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Theme Section

“Mother”, “martyr wife” or “mujahida”: the Muslim woman in Danish online jihadi Salafism

A study of the assigned role of the Muslim
woman in online jihadi communication

Keywords

defensive jihad; jihad; Salafism;
social media; women.

Abstract The jihadi Salafi woman is generally portrayed as excluded from the battlefield. However, studies on the issue are few, and in the Danish context non-existent. This paper therefore explores how three Danish so-called jihadi Salafi groups construct the Muslim woman’s role in defensive jihad in their online communication. The paper is based on an open-source study of social media. It finds that while some Danish jihadi Salafi uploads exclude Muslim women from combat, others construct defensive jihad as an individual obligation even for women. The paper proposes and reflects upon three conceptual types of online construction: “mother”, “martyr wife”, and “mujahida”.

1. That is, Danish Islamic groups who view jihad as a central aspect of being Muslim. The Danish jihadi groups are termed “jihadi Salafis” as they self-position within a violent fraction within Salafism known as jihadi Salafism (Wiktorowicz 2006), e.g. by legitimising defensive jihadism, paying tribute to martyrs etc. online.

The jihadi Salafi woman is usually portrayed as excluded from the battlefield (Saltman and Schmidt 2015; Vogel, Porter and Kebbell 2014; Lahoud 2014). However, studies on the issue are few, and in the Danish context non-existent. Accordingly, this paper explores the way in which three Danish groups positioning themselves as jihadi and Salafi¹ construct the Muslim woman’s role in defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf’a*), i.e. violent defence of Islam (Lahoud 2014). The main argument of the paper is that the overall exclusion of women from defensive jihad does not hold

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in the case of online Danish jihadi Salafism. Thus, the paper finds that while some Danish jihadi Salafi uploads either refrain from calling on women to practise defensive jihad or explicitly exclude them, others discursively construct defensive jihad as *fard 'ayn* – an obligation on every individual – even for women. Building on an open-source study of social media, the paper proposes and reflects upon three conceptual types of online construction of the Muslim woman's role in jihad: "the mother", "the martyr wife", and "the mujahida" (female jihadi fighter²), illustrating trends and patterns in the data.

The issue of jihadism has been on the public agenda in Denmark since the cartoons controversy of 2005-6, intensifying with the "Copenhagen shootings" of 2015. The substantial number of Danish Muslims who have gone to Syria and Iraq as "foreign fighters" further caused the Danish discourse to explode. Particularly relevant to the subject of this paper is that while the latest figures show a decrease in the number of Western Muslim men leaving, they show an increase in the number of Muslim women (Vogel, Porter and Kebbell 2014; Saltman and Schmidt 2015). In 2015 it was estimated that up to 550 Western women had left for Syria and Iraq in recent years (Saltman and Schmidt 2015).³ Between 21 and 25 of these women were Danish, with five recently returning to Denmark. Questions are now being asked as to how and why women are being recruited, what role they play in jihad, and what motivated them to take part.

While many researchers have examined the (re-)emergence and widespread dissemination of Salafi-like currents within contemporary Islam,⁴ the issue of Muslim women and jihad has been almost completely overlooked. Thus, with a few exceptions, such as a report on gender and the ISIS phenomenon (Saltman and Schmidt 2015), a paper on the broader issue of women in contemporary political and revolutionary conflicts

2. In the present paper the term is used to conceptualise a female engaged in violent jihad. Accordingly, it should not be confused with the way in which the term is also used to conceptualise jihadi women accompanying their husbands.

3. The numbers were calibrated in December 2015 and are today considered to be much higher.

4. Several studies present a signifi-

cant advance in our understanding of the diverse forms of contemporary jihadi Salafism (e.g. Roy 2004, Wiktorowicz 2005; 2006; Hegghammer 2013; 2009; 2008a; 2008b; Hegghammer and Lacroix 2007; Bakker 2006; Sageman 2004; 2008). Others put forth considerations regarding the importance of Salafism as a discourse of identity and empowerment focusing e.g. on the attraction of

jihadism (e.g. Hemmingsen 2010; Khosrokhavar 2005; 2009; 2008; Trujillo et al. 2009; Wiktorowicz 2005; 2006) or specific cases of individuals involved in jihad or the planning of terrorism (e.g. Sageman 2004; Nesser 2010; Jensen 2006; Bakker 2006), or more recently, the ideology etc. of ISIS (e.g., Pollarda, Poplackb & Casey 2015; Saltman and Winter 2014).

(Vogel, Porter and Kebbell 2014), and Lahoud's paper on the ideological literature of jihadi women (Lahoud 2014), hardly any studies have examined jihadism and women in depth.⁵ There are no in-depth studies on the issue of the Muslim woman in the specific field of Danish jihadi Salafism.⁶

Within literature, women who take part in religious and/or political violence are generally treated as aberrations (Vogel, Porter and Kebbell 2014). Large-scale participation by women is commonly dismissed, and women taking these roles are usually portrayed as filling secondary support roles rather than as combatants (Vogel, Porter and Kebbell 2014). More specifically in the case of jihadi Salafists, the jihadi Salafi woman is usually portrayed as the wife or the mother of jihadis, and studies argue that the jihadists debar women from practising defensive jihad (Saltman and Schmidt 2015; Lahoud 2014).

The present paper consists of three sections. Section one briefly sets the frame of reference, elaborating on the classical doctrine of jihad; section two sets out how Danish online jihadi Salafists construct the modern Muslim woman's role in jihad; and section three discusses and reflects upon the findings.

The aim of this paper is to gain insight into the neglected issue of the Muslim woman's role in jihad. Its contribution is mainly empirical. Its findings demonstrate the various different roles assigned to the modern Muslim woman in contemporary Danish online jihadi Salafism. While some studies have focused on women in conflict in a broader perspective, this one aims to establish an understanding of the discursive construction of the Muslim woman role in jihad within Danish online jihadi Salafism. Given the crucial difference between attitude and action, however, it is neither the purpose nor within the scope of this paper to contribute insight into the question of how online-constructed perceptions are practised offline.

The paper is based on an open-source study of Danish jiha-

5. Other studies, however, address the issue of woman and Salafism more generally, e.g. examining Irish female Salafi converts (Shanneik 2011) and Salafism and young women in London (Inge 2015), or life stories of female Salafists in the Netherlands (de Koning 2015).

6. Studies focusing specifically on Danish jihadi Salafism are few, and

some rather outdated. Among these otherwise excellent studies are e.g. Tårnby's overview of jihadi related cases in Denmark from 1990–2006 (Tårnby 2006, Hemmingsen's study of the attractions of jihadism based on five Danish terrorism cases in 2008 (Hemmingsen 2010), and Kühle and Lindekilde's study of so-called radicalisation among

young Muslims (among other aspects focusing on jihad and jihadism) carried out in 2008–9 (Kühle og Lindekilde 2010). Moreover, Jensen and Østergaard's study on extremist environments with a focus on Salafi groupings (Jensen og Østergaard 2011), and Crone's 2009 paper on Salafism and jihadism (Crone 2009).

di Salafists operating on social media. More specifically, it is based on online monitoring of text and audio uploads on “open”, official Facebook profiles by three Danish jihadi Salafi groups.⁷ The groups⁸ studied in the paper are The Call For Islam (Kaldet til Islam⁹), the Muslim Youth Centre (MUC Aarhus), and Islamic Teaching (Islamisk Undervisning), also called Masjid Quba or Islamisk Kulturcenter.

To briefly introduce the three jihadi Salafist groups. The Call for Islam (Kaldet til Islam) was until recently one of the most visible and vocal Islamic organisations in Denmark (Crone 2011). The group regularly attracted media attention, for instance when they publicly announced the establishment of sharia zones in certain areas of Copenhagen, or during the 2011 parliamentary elections when they urged Muslims not to vote. The group, whose members includes one individual acquitted in the Glostrup case (also known as the Sarajevo case) (Crone 2011), has close ties to Anjem Choudary, a British Islamist activist who has been a key figure in several banned Islamic groups in the United Kingdom and was recently convicted there of terrorism (Crone 2011).¹⁰ The Call for Islam has been dissolved and several of its members, including its leader, Shiraz Tariq (also known as Abu Musa), have died as foreign fighters in Syria.¹¹ However, the group’s construction of the Muslim woman is still an interesting case as this group is one of the main actors in the establishment of a Danish online jihadi narrative.

The Muslim Youth Centre is less visible and less vocal, rarely appearing in the Danish media.¹² However, the mosque attended by its members – the Grimhøj mosque in Aarhus¹³ – has attracted frequent media attention, most recently when its imam was portrayed in a documentary as expressing support for stoning for women as a punishment for adultery.¹⁴ Numerous Danish foreign fighters have furthermore in various ways been connected to the Muslim Youth Centre.¹⁵

7. The group profiles are technically registered online as a religious organisation, a community and an affiliation/mosque.

8. In the present paper, “group” is defined in a broad sense to mean a gathering of people with a shared religion. The specific Danish jihadi Salafi groups included in the paper all exist or existed online as well as off-line.

9. Including the Facebook profile, The Call’s articles (Kaldets artikler).

10. theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/anjem-choudary-jailed-for-five-years-and-six-months-for-urg-

ing-support-of-isis

11. b.dk/nationalt/her-er-de-hellige-krigere-fra-danmark

12. jyllands-posten.dk/aarhus/politik/ECE8520748/grimhoej-moske-smider-omstridt-forening-paa-gaden/

13. Or attended, as the youth group is accordingly excluded from the mosque: jyllands-posten.dk/aarhus/

politik/ECE8520748/grimhoej-moske-smider-omstridt-forening-paa-gaden/

14. dr.dk/nyheder/indland/medie-grimhoej-imam-underviser-i-stening-og-piskeslag

15. politiken.dk/udland/fokus_int/fokus_IS/ECE2414876/aarhus-syrien-krigere-kom-fra-ungdoms-gruppe-i-mosk/

Islamic Teaching also rarely participates in the Danish media or attends public events. This group is considered rather classic or traditional and follows only one sheikh, Sheikh Abu Ahmad (Hemmingsen 2012). Some of those implicated in two recent Danish terror cases – the Glostrup case and the Glasvej case, also known as “Operation Dagger” – are reported to have participated in Abu Ahmad’s classes (Hemmingsen 2012; Crone 2011).

While the online Danish jihadi Salafist groups share enemy images, ideology, and political issues to a certain extent, they also disagree about such essential details as where, how and when the establishment of an Islamic state and sharia are to take place, and are sometimes in direct conflict with each other (Hemmingsen 2012). 15 uploads concerning the Muslim woman’s role in jihad are posted by Islamic Teaching, 5 uploads are posted by The Muslim Youth Centre and 2 uploads are posted by The Call for Islam.

The paper is based on these Danish Salafi jihadi groups because they were the best established groups online at the time of data collection. The groups included in the study are termed Salafi jihadi because of the various ways in which they self-position within a violent fraction of Salafism known as jihadi Salafism (Wiktorowicz 2006). Simply put, the concept of Salafism is derived from the Arabic expression *as-salaf as-salih* (the pious predecessors), which refers to the Prophet and the first generations of rightly guided Muslims (Wiktorowicz 2006). Salafism as a general approach to the interpretation of Islam is thus embedded in the idea of following in the footsteps of these early generations and deriving religious guidance directly from the sources (Wiktorowicz 2006). Some of the Danish jihadi Salafi groups’ uploads strongly position them as Salafists, or what they term *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama’a*. The markers by which this is done include stressing that they follow the way of Salafi, constructing the “right Islam” online in a textually rigorous way rooted in premodern time, and placing a strong emphasis on being jihadists by, for example, legitimising the violent defence of Islam, glorifying martyrdom, and paying tribute to specific martyrs.

The methodological approach of the paper was to capture all text and audio uploaded by the Danish jihadi Salafi groups on their official Facebook profiles from the time of the particular

profile's online foundation (in 2013, 2012 and 2012) up to August 2015. I then examined all the data to identify the codes recurring in the text and audio uploads more or less directly concerning jihad. The following codes were identified: jihad*, martyr*, mujahid*, death, shahid*, Salafi*. The variant spellings of the Arabic words were included and the codes were all trunked, which means that all words beginning with the code were included, e.g. jihadism, martyrdom etc. Applying these codes, I collected 355 text uploads, comprising 206 pages of text and 24 audios¹⁶ of 145 minutes and one second, all more or less directly concerning jihadism.¹⁷ To capture the female-specific jihadi uploads, those concerning jihad were then coded a second time in terms of woman, women, Muslima, sister and wife. Although most of the uploads are in Danish, all codes were also applied in English. I thus ended up with the specific data on which this paper is based: that is, 13 text uploads comprising 10 pages of text, and 8 audios of 66 minutes and 77 seconds. Uploads in which the codes technically appear but with no relation to the issue of women's role in jihad were not included in the data.¹⁸ Furthermore, text and audio repeaters – either within the same group profile or across group profiles – were included only once. Other data not included were uploads that in one way or another have been removed from Facebook – “takedowns”. It must also be noted that Facebook regulations can themselves serve as a form of censorship, meaning that the Danish jihadi Salafists can only freely express their views on jihad online up to a point. Unfortunately, it is not possible for me to know the extent of this online censorship. All text and audio uploads included in the paper were uploaded by the Danish jihadi Salafi groups themselves on their official Facebook profiles (rather than by “followers”). Thus, while the uploads will inevitably reflect the attitude of the individuals running the official group profile, they will

16. The audio uploads included in the paper are those with at least one of the codes in the text upload introducing the audio, the audio title or the link. Ideally, all online audio would be translated and coded, but the profiles have years of active online lives, and in practice this would mean transcribing and coding hundreds of videos often hours long.

17. Some of the uploads posted on the Danish jihadi Salafists' official profiles were re-posts, or text and audio put together using material from other platforms, such as international jihadi Salafi material. I argue that reposts express and reflect the perception of the specific Danish jihadi Salafi group.

18. These are the following: three

uploads concerning the death of martyrs in which it is simply stated that a wife was left behind; one upload mentioning that mujahida is a female version of the term mujahid, without specifying how it is to be understood; and one upload discussing death, simply stating that some women said *takbir*. Five in total.

represent the official view of the Danish jihadis. All text and audio uploads were stored and systematised in the qualitative software programme Nvivo.

From being a rather unregulated field of research relatively few years ago, online research has recently become the focus of multiple ethical concerns and debates (NESH 2014; Cavanagh 1999). Yet there is still no clear consensus on these issues or on ethical procedures for so-called internet-based research (NESH 2014; Bakardjieva and Feenberg 2001).¹⁹ Applying an open-source approach in which the researcher has no social interaction with those observed and cannot “go native” or engage in a relationship with the informants, creates a risk of ethnocentrism on the part of the researcher, as the researcher might attribute meaning on the basis of their own perception of the world (Gold 1958). Striving to reduce these methodological risks, I wanted to meet with the groups to ask clarifying questions and get a broader perspective on the findings. All the groups were contacted, but at the time of writing they have not responded. Potential disagreements on my findings will therefore be registered in my forthcoming dissertation (to be completed in 2017).

Analysis of the uploads is based on the theory of psychological discourse analysis (or discursive psychology), rooted in social constructionism and post-structuralism (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). It thus builds on the basic assumption that the world is socially constructed through language, both spoken and written, and that language shapes identities, social relations, and understandings of the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). According to psychological discourse analysis, social texts such as the texts and audios uploaded by the Danish jihadi Salafists construct a version of world situations or categories pre-existing in the social world, rather than merely reflecting or mirroring them (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 6). Rather than attempting to unravel major societal discourses, the main concern of psychological discourse analysis and of this paper is to examine how people strategically and flexibly use available discourses in a micro-context, i.e. in everyday social interaction (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Thus, discourses are considered to be situational, contextual language that can be used strategically rather than abstract systems (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Positioning, i.e. assigning roles, is an important concept in discursive psychology and an integral part of social

19. Two interrelated questions that are particularly relevant for the approach of this paper are (1) the publicity of the groups, and (2) researcher visibility and informed consent in cyberspace. I acknowledge that official, so-called open profiles, despite being technically visible to everyone online, can create the feeling of a private place – a so-called “imagined community” (Anderson 1999). However, I argue that informed consent is implicit in the act of posting an upload to a public group accessible to everyone online. Furthermore, declaring my presence as a researcher could potentially impact the groups’ online behaviour, which I wished to be as natural as possible. Therefore I have neither declared my presence nor gained informed consent from the Danish jihadi Salafi groups. For further elaboration on ethical issues and methodology see my forthcoming dissertation.

interaction (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Potter and Wetherell 1987). It takes place actively through the use of language. In positioning, identities are created or negotiated between people. In social interaction, attributes can be assigned to a category, thereby creating a position/role such as martyr wife, just as one can self-position claiming to own the assigned attributes to that specific category (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

Identifying the positions within the text and audio uploads of the three groups, I went through all the female-specific jihadi communication²⁰ looking for the most dominant positions. Three positions were identified: mother, martyr wife, and mujahida. All uploads concerning the Muslim woman's role in jihad were then analysed in order to find whether they discursively positioned the Muslim woman as mother, martyr wife, or mujahida. The past few years have witnessed a rise in the number of martyrdom/suicide operations carried out by women. As most jihadis have welcomed martyrdom operations as appropriate action for women with no need for close contact with a male relative or *mahram* (Lahoud 2014), one might expect this position to be explicit in the Danish jihadi Salafi groups' construction of women's role in jihad. However, that was not the case.

The classical doctrine on defensive jihad

The discourse within the Danish jihadi Salafists' online construction of the Muslim woman's role in jihad heavily reflects the classical doctrine of defensive jihad. These issues will therefore be briefly examined in the following section.

Before the advent of the modern nation-state, Muslim jurists developed a legal theory of warfare distinguishing between offensive and defensive warfare. Simply put, offensive jihad (*jihad al-talab*) was war to be waged against other states, while defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf'a*) addressed the need for all Muslims to fight if their own territories were invaded. Thus offensive jihad was connected to military conquest and was considered a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) for mature able-bodied males, whereas defensive jihad was related to defending oneself and was considered an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) upon both men and women (Lahoud 2014; Hegghammer 2008a; 2008b;

20. That is, uploading text and audio and not communication between groups.

Wiktorowicz 2006). According to the classical doctrine, the individual obligation of defensive jihad applies to those residing in a territory that is under attack or those who are nearby (Lahoud 2014; Hegghammer 2008a; 2008b; Wiktorowicz 2006). Modern jihadi Salafists drop this distinction, however, as they perceive the “enemy” (i.e. the West, apostate regimes etc.) as being in charge of Muslim territories and Islam as being under attack, and therefore call on all Muslims to defend themselves (Lahoud 2014; Hegghammer 2008a; 2008b). Modern jihadi Salafists have thus turned defensive jihad from a territorially oriented doctrine into a contemporary global military programme (Lahoud 2014; Hegghammer 2008a; 2008b; Wiktorowicz 2006). Accordingly, the doctrine of defensive jihad defines their rationale for embracing jihad (Lahoud 2014).

However, some modern jihadi Salafists explain the exclusion of women from the battlefield on the basis that a woman may only travel in the company of her husband or a *mahram*, male relative whom she may not marry (Lahoud 2014). They thus assume that the Muslim woman will be among male non-relatives in situations of combat. While it is true that the classical legal tradition makes it obligatory for women to travel with a *mahram*, the same legal stipulation does not apply to the extraordinary circumstances of defensive jihad. Thus in times of defensive warfare, classical jurists specified that no woman is required to seek permission from another to defend herself (Lahoud 2014; Hegghammer 2008a; 2008b; Wiktorowicz 2006).

Women’s role in jihad

The following section explores the question of the modern Muslim woman’s role in jihad in the texts and audios uploaded by Danish jihadi Salafists. It presents several rather different roles assigned to the Muslim woman within contemporary Danish online jihadi Salafism. In what follows, I put forward a typology of the roles assigned to the Muslim woman in Danish jihadi Salafism communication online. The typology illustrates how some Danish jihadi Salafi uploads exclude the Muslim woman from jihad, while others construct jihad as *fard ‘ayn* – an individual obligation – even for women. I propose three conceptual types of online construction of the Muslim woman’s role in

jihad: "mother", "martyr wife", and "mujahida", illustrating trends and patterns in the data.

The woman as excluded from defensive jihad

When the Danish jihadi Salafi uploads either refrain from calling on women to practise jihad or explicitly exclude them from combat, the Muslim woman is conceptually constructed as "mother" or "martyr wife". The two conceptual types are elaborated on in the following.

"Mother"

Within the conceptual type "mother," in their uploads the Danish jihadi Salafists construct the Muslim woman's role as bringing children into the world and raising them in the way of the martyrs. Thus the woman's role is to provide the next generation of jihadi fighters. One example is a question and answer uploaded by one of the groups: "How can a sister support jihad? By raising lions who'll fight for this Ummah!" (Islamic Teaching, 12 December 2012).²¹ This is explained further in a text upload by the same group discussing the role of women:

Søstre det vigtigt at forstå vi kvinder er dem som skal opdrage vores kommende børn/eller hvis søstre har børn mashallah må Allah beskytte dem ameen. Vi må forstå at islam har givet os en stor ære.. vi må udnytte vores eneste chance (som er i dunya) kun for at behage Allah den almægtige (...). (Islamic Teaching, 20 February 2013)

Sisters, it is important to understand we women are the ones who must raise our future children / or if sisters have children *mashallah* may Allah protect them, ameen. We must understand that Islam has given us a great honour... we must use our only chance (which is in *Dunya*) to please Allah Almighty (...). (my translation)

Further examples are the following two text uploads in which, according to one of the groups, the Muslim woman's role is to "have" and to "bring up little mujahideen" (Islamic Teaching, 25 January 2013, my translation) and take care of them when the

21. If not specified, texts were written in English. All Arabic words are kept as they appear online.

men "leave Fisabilillah" (ibid.) (fi sabilillah, "for the sake of Allah", is used as a synonym for violent jihad).²² Thus the group assigns to the Muslim woman the role of making sure that the next generation takes on the family jihad:

Brødre gift jer og få små mujahideen!!! ps tag ud fisabilillah in shaa Allah søstre skal passe på dem. (Islamic Teaching, 25 January 2013)

Brothers, marry and have little mujahideen!!! Furthermore leave *fisabilillah*, *in shaa Allah* sisters will take care of them [the little mujahideen]. (my translation)

Sig mig søstre og brødre? Hvad er vi skabt for? Hvad er det lige præcis vi vil i dunya? (...) Enten får vi shariah eller også smager vi sødmen af martyrdom Allahu Akbar!!!!!!! Brødre og søstre dør vi ikke alligevel? Jo så lad det være Fisabilillah! Alt skal være Fisabilillah in shaa Allah ta'ala!!! Søstre vi kvinder skal opdrage små mujahideen!!!!!! Løver af deen Ul Haqq? Hvad venter vi på. yallah bismillah kom i gang (Islamic Teaching, 25 February 2013)

Tell me sisters and brothers? What are we created for? What is it exactly that we want in *dunya*? (...) Either we get Sharia or else we will taste the sweetness of martyrdom, *Allahu akbar*!!!!!!! Brothers and sisters, do we not die anyway? Yes, then let it be *Fisabilillah*! Everything must be *Fisabilillah in Shaa Allah Ta'ala*. Sisters, we women must bring up little mujahideen!!!!!! Lions of the *deen Ul Haqq* [*din al-haq*, the religion of righteousness]? What are we waiting for. *Yallah bismillah*, get started! (my translation)

This latter text upload, which purports to be uploaded by a Muslim woman ("sisters, we women (...)", illustrates a trend in the data, namely that the Danish jihadi Salafists construct the role of the Muslim woman through a woman's voice instructing Muslim men to practise jihad while Muslim women take care of the next generation of jihadi fighters. Thus they position the Muslim woman as a mother.

22. The meaning of "Fisabilillah" is specified in multiple text uploads by the same Danish jihadi Salafists. It is e.g. specified in a text upload stressing that "(...) if the phrase 'Fee Sabeelillah' (For the sake of Allah) is mentioned, it means al-jihad (...) when 'jihad Feesabeelillah' is said, it cannot be used in general except from in relation to striving against Kuffar with the sword (...)" (Islamic Teaching, 28 November 2012, my translation). "(...) hvis udtrykket 'Fee Sabeelillah' (For Allahs skyld) nævnes, så betyder det al-jihad (...) når 'jihad Feesabeelillah' er sagt, så kan det ikke anvendes (til alt) i almindelighed bortset fra at stræbe mod Kuffar med sværdet (...)" (Islamic Teaching, 28 November 2012, original text).

"The martyr wife"

The other non-military conceptual type – the “martyr wife” – in the construction of the Muslim woman’s role in jihad is centred on the Muslim male. In their uploads, the Danish jihadi Salafi groups assign the Muslim woman the role of supportive wife. An example is an audio upload portraying the life of a “jihadi wife” living in Aleppo. The audio assigns this woman the role of “fighter by marriage”, and the woman herself defensively states, while firing her weapon, “I am not oppressed (...) If I thought Islam was an oppressive religion, I would leave Islam. Islam has made me free” (Islamic Teaching, 26 July 2013). The audio furthermore emphasises that this woman would fight if she could, but “that is not her role” (ibid.); and the woman self-positions stressing that she is “a martyr’s wife, supporting and showing solidarity with the martyr’s course” (ibid.). The audio is uploaded along with a text upload headlined “ma sha Allah, om nogle muslimer som har svaret på forpligtelsen i Syrien” (“*ma sha Allah*, about some Muslims that have the answer to the obligation in Syria”, Islamic Teaching, 26 July 2013, my translation)

In addition to being a supportive wife, the Muslim woman’s role within this conceptual type is to encourage and praise the glory of martyrdom and the honour of being a martyr widow. One of the groups constructs this role by, for example, uploading an audio authored by a martyr wife who gives her own life story in glorifying terms. According to the audio, the martyr wife recently became a jihadi widow and proudly, on behalf of every widow of the umma, gives a *nasihah* (a piece of advice) to her Muslim sisters. The audio praises the jihadi husband now “previous to all other men” (Islamic Teaching, 6 January 2013) and a “pride for all Muslims” (ibid.) and addresses a well-known “jihadi sura” (Sura 2, al-Baqara, verse 154) stressing that they should not think of “those who are killed in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord” (ibid.). It further emphasises the pride of being a martyr widow and advises Muslim “sisters” to achieve their share in jihad accompanying the mujahideen:

Me and every other widow of our Ummah are full of pride and bliss, that Allah has chosen our husbands previous to all other men. And that he has priced us by

this trial. I say this full of pride. My husband has left for the Ummah and for the pride of all Muslims the *Dunya* and the delusive luxury behind himself, and decided for himself, along with me and our daughter, for a life in freedom. For a life in Jihad (...) Do not think those who are killed in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord. I have decided for myself for this life here. And I will keep on achieving my obligation to Jihad. My beloved sisters, I advise you achieve your share and accompany the Mujahideen (...). (Islamic Teaching, 6 January 2013)

The martyr widow in the audio self-positions as an autonomous female, stating that while her husband – along with her (ibid.) – decided for a life in jihad, she decided for herself (ibid.) to stay and to keep achieving her obligation to jihad as a martyr widow. Thus the group, through the audio upload and through the voice of a strong, independent female, underlines that the role of the Muslim woman is to be a martyr wife/widow, not to join in the husband's martyrdom.

To sum up, in the cases where the Danish uploads either refrain from calling on women to practise jihad or explicitly exclude them from combat, the Muslim woman is conceptually constructed as "mother" or "martyr wife". The main roles within these conceptual types are, respectively, bringing children into the world and raising them in the way of the martyr (thereby providing the next generation of jihadi fighters), and being the supporting and encouraging wife so as to glorify both martyrdom and the position of martyr widow. Constructing the Muslim woman as excluded from combat, the Danish jihadi Salafists are not dismissive of women, nor do they wish to position Muslim women or the role they play in jihad as passive. On the contrary, the Muslim woman is constructed as strong in the shape of a vital mother and authoritative wife, and the success of jihad is constructed as depending on this non-military support by women.

The Muslim woman as included in defensive jihad

The Danish jihadi Salafi groups' online construction of the Muslim woman also includes the construction of the woman as fe-

male jihadi fighter included in combat. This conceptual type is in the present paper termed “the mujahida” and will be elaborated on in the following.

“The mujahida”

Within the conceptual type of “the mujahida,” jihad is constructed as an individual obligation even for women. The online construction of this conceptual type – unlike the previous two – refers more directly to the classical doctrines of defensive jihad. Accordingly, while the Danish jihadi Salafi groups’ rationale for embracing jihad in general is the doctrine of defensive jihad, they have additionally adapted defensive jihad so as to argue that the role of the female jihadi fighter is lawful. The arguments online are thus based on the perception that when the land of Islam is invaded, a “call to arms” (*naḥīr ‘amm*) is in place and jihad becomes an obligation incumbent upon every Muslim individual. An example is a text upload stating that “Jihaad er ikke obligatorisk for kvinder i princippet, undtagen i tilfælde af nødvendighed, såsom hvis kuffaar angriber et muslimsk land, i dette tilfælde bliver jihaad obligatorisk for kvinder, i henhold til deres evner.” (“*Jihaad* is not obligatory for women, in principle, except in cases of necessity, such as if the *kuffaar* attack a Muslim country, in this case, *Jihaad* is obligatory for women in accordance with their capabilities”, Islamic Teaching, 20 June 2013, my translation). Another example is the following text quoting ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam, who played a key role in popularising the legal doctrine of defensive jihad and is referred to as their “beloved Mujaahid and Sheikh” and “the innovator of jihad of the century” (Islamic Teaching, 20 June 2013, my translation). The upload emphasises that “when the enemy is trying to invade a Muslim country”, the Muslim woman’s role in jihad is “*fard ‘ayn*” (i.e. an individual obligation) and “an individual duty” (ibid.):

Al-Kaasaani al-Hanafi (må Allaah være ham nådig) sagde: “I en tid med generel mobilisering, som når fjenden forsøger at invadere et muslimsk land, så bliver det en individuel forpligtelse (*fardh ‘ayn*) på hver enkelt muslim der er i stand til at kæmpe (...)” Der siges noget lignende i al-Sharh al-Sagheer, en af Maalikis bøger

(2/274) som konstaterer at hvis fjenden angriber et muslimsk land, så bliver jihaad en individuel pligt for enhver mand og kvinde. (Islamic Teaching, 20 June 2013)

Al-Kaasaani al-Hanafi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "In a time of general mobilisation, such as when the enemy is trying to invade a Muslim country, it becomes an individual obligation (*fardh 'ayn*) on every Muslim who is able to fight, (...)" Al-Sharh al-Sagheer, one of Maliki's books (2/274) says something similar, stating that if an enemy attacks a Muslim country, Jihaad becomes an individual duty upon every man and woman. (my translation)

In the same upload, the group further addresses the *mahram* discussion within modern jihadism. As noted, some modern jihadi Salafists explain the exclusion of women from the battlefield on the basis that women may only travel in the company of their husbands or a *mahram*, thus assuming that the Muslim woman will be escorted by male non-relatives in circumstances of combat (Lahoud 2014). The narrative in the upload, however, reflects the argument that while it is true that the classical legal tradition makes it obligatory for women to travel with a mahram, the same legal stipulation does not apply to the extraordinary circumstances of a defensive jihad:²³

Jihaad i de tilfælde, hvor fjenden har invaderet det muslimske land, obligatorisk for alle raske personer, mænd og kvinder, og en kvinde kan så gå ud uden sin mands tilladelse. (Islamic Teaching, 20 June 2009)

Jihaad is, in cases where the enemy has invaded the Muslim country, obligatory for all healthy people, men and women, and a woman can go out without her husband's permission (my translation)

The Danish jihadi Salafists continue to position the female jihadi fighter as included in combat by referring to or quoting hadiths in which the Prophet praises women's jihad in situations when he and others faced an existential threat. Some of these hadiths even recount women saving the Prophet's life, and they stress the role model character that can appeal indirectly to contemporary Muslim women to emulate their example. Among

23. In several other uploads the Danish jihadi Salafi groups argue that it is unlawful for a woman to go without a mahram. Examples include: "De folk som skriver til søstre fra Syrien om at flygte til dem uden mahram og lov, og lover dem ægteskab etc de skal frygte Allah i muslimernes ære." ("Those people who write to the sisters from Syria about escaping to them without mahram and law and promise them marriage etc. they should fear Allah in the honour of Muslims.", Islamic Teaching, 28 May 2014, my translation); or "Hvilket sørgelig tilstand vi er havnet i, kvinder/unge piger rejser uden mahram til sham uden mahram (...)" ("What a sorry state we've ended up in, women/young girls traveling to Sham without a mahram (...)", Islamic Teaching, 23 February 2014, my translation); or "Not one of you should meet a woman alone unless she is accompanied by a relative (mahram) (Bukhari/Muslim), any righteous man would know this Hadith!" (Islamic Teaching, 15 January 2013, original text).

these is the story of Umm 'Umara (called Umm Imara on the Muslim Youth Centre's profile, and Nasiba Bint Kaab al Mazini on the Islamic Teaching profile), who fought in several battles and sustained numerous injuries to the extent that the Prophet himself is said to have extolled her heroism on the battlefield:

Mange mænd vil ønske, de var så modige, som hun var. Hun frygtede kun Allah (swt). Hun frygtede ikke nogen ud over Allah (swt)(...) Da hun så, at profeten han var omringet, og at Muhammed han var truet, og at hele Islam var truet, trak hun et sværd frem (...) så hører man, at det er blevet berettet, at Muhammed, han sagde; Jeg så til højre, og der så jeg umm Imara, hun kæmpede og slog ud fra sig og forsvarede mig. Så så jeg til venstre, og igen så jeg Umm Imara, hun slog og kæmpede, og hun forsvarede mig (...) Det er en stor ære til Umm Imara, at hun virkelig deltog i alle de her store begivenheder. Denne kvinde, hun havde nogle gode egenskaber, som mange mænd på jorden i dag ikke har. (The Muslim Youth Centre, 2 June 2015, my transcription)

Many men wish they were as courageous as she was. She feared only Allah (swt). She did not fear anyone but Allah (swt) (...) When she saw that the Prophet was surrounded and that Muhammed was threatened and that entire Islam was threatened, she drew a sword. (...) we hear that it is narrated that Muhammad (saws), he said; I looked to the right, then I saw Umm Imara, she fought and struck, and defended me. And then I looked to the left and again I see Umm Imara, she struck, and fought and she defended me. It is a great honour to Umm Imara that she participated in all these events. This woman, she had some great characteristics that many men do not have today. (my translation)

Reference is made not only to the women from the time of the Prophet, but to militant females within modern history, so that not only is the Muslim woman positioned as included in combat, but her role in jihad is equated with that of men. Examples are the following text uploads in which one of the groups states that women fought "on equal terms with weapon in hand de-

fending Islam against the enemy” and “participated on equal terms with their brothers” (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012, my translation):

Mennesker, som har bare lidt kendskab til muslimsk kultur og muslimsk historie, vil vide, at den vestlige opfattelse af den muslimske kvinde som et umælende, undertrykt og sart væsen er en skrøne. Den muslimske kvinde – som defineret af islam i sine skrifter i form af Koranen og Sunnah – er tværtimod et stærkt og selvbevidst væsen. Hvor mange i Vesten ved, at da Profeten Muhammed (fred med ham) lå i strid med de lokale vantro stammer på den arabiske halvø, havde hans hær af troende soldater selskab af mange kvinder, der på ligeværdig måde med våben i hånd forsvarede islam mod fjenden? (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012)

People who have just a little knowledge of Muslim culture and Muslim history will know that the Western perception of the Muslim woman as an unintelligent, oppressed, and faint-hearted creature is a myth. The Muslim woman – as defined by Islam in the form of the Qur'an and Sunnah – is on the contrary a strong and self-conscious being. How many in the West know that when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was in conflict with the local infidel tribes in the Arabian peninsula, his army of faithful soldiers was joined by many women fighting on equal terms with weapon in hand defending Islam against the enemy? (...). (my translation)

Moderne muslimsk historie har også sat fokus på de muslimske kvindelig helte; navne som Leila Khaled, Dalal Maghrebi, Fatma Barnawi, Djamila Bu Hreide og Sawsan Zahra er blot nogle af de kvinder, der deltog på lige fod med deres mandlige brødre i kampe for frihed og mod undertrykkelse (...). (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012)

Modern Muslim history has also highlighted the Muslim female heroes: names like Leila Khaled, Dalal Maghrebi, Fatma Barnawi, Djamila Bu Hreide and Sawsan Zahra

are just some of the women who participated on equal terms with their brothers in fighting for freedom and against oppression (...). (my translation)

Last but not least, as illustrated by the first passage cited above, within the conceptual type of "the mujahida" the narrative on the Muslim woman particularly repudiates what is considered to be "the Western perception of the Muslim woman" (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012, my translation), which supposedly sees the Muslim woman as "unintelligent, oppressed and faint-hearted" (ibid.). This perception is countered by positioning the Muslim woman as a strong female jihadi fighter who is the equal of men, referring to women both at the time of the Prophet and modern militant women who were said to be "fighting for freedom and against oppression" (ibid.). Another example of the Danish jihadi Salafis opposing a perceived Western discourse is the following upload, which counter-narrates the "idea of the Muslim woman as weak, oppressed and reserved". Here the group counter-position the Muslim woman, stressing that among "Islam's first defenders were several brave and enterprising women" (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012, my translation) and that "Islam gives women strength and knowledge" (ibid.).

Ideen om den muslimske kvinde som et svagt, undertrykt og tilbagestående væsen er meget udbredt i den vestlige verden. Modstanden i Vesten mod islam kædes ofte sammen med kvindens ret til selvbestemmelse og frihed; men i realiteten er den vestlige "frihed" medvirkende til at holde den muslimske kvinde nede. Blandt islams første forkæmpere befandt sig adskillige modige og initiativrige kvinder – hvor er omtalen af dem i de vestlige medier, i vestlig litteratur? (...) Profeten (fred med ham) modtog sin første åbenbaring med ordene "Læs!" – og det kan måske også være en inspiration til ikke-muslimer, for enhver med interesse for kvindens stilling indenfor islam behøver blot at studere islams historie og skrifter for at finde ud af, at kvinden hverken er et undertrykt, svagt eller tilbagestående væsen. At islam giver kvinden styrke og viden. Men i vesten vil man ikke læse. (Islamic Teaching, 28 October 2012)

The idea of the Muslim woman as a weak, oppressed and reserved creature is widespread in the Western world. The resistance in the West against Islam is often associated with women's rights to self-determination and freedom; but in reality, Western "freedom" contributes to keeping the Muslim woman down. Among Islam's first defenders were several brave and enterprising women – where is the mention of them in the Western media, in Western literature? (...) The Prophet (peace be upon him) received his first revelation with the words "Read!" – And this could also be an inspiration to non-Muslims, for anyone with an interest in the position of women in Islam only needs to study the history of Islam and its writings to find that woman is neither an oppressed, weak, nor restrained creature. That Islam gives women strength and knowledge. But in the West, one will not read. (my translation)

To sum up, in the conceptual type of "the mujahida," the Muslim woman is assigned the role of female jihadi fighter, included in combat fighting on equal terms with men. As these uploads illustrate, particularly within the conceptual type of the mujahida, the Danish jihadi Salafi groups repeatedly construct the Muslim woman by counter-narrating what they consider to be "the Western perception of the Muslim woman".

Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, while the literature stresses that jihadists exclude women from practising defensive jihad (Vogel, Porter and Keibell 2014; Lahoud 2014), this paper has demonstrated that the Facebook uploads of the three Danish jihadi Salafi groups do not completely exclude women from the battlefield. Accordingly, a typology has highlighted three conceptual types illustrating the discursive construction of roles assigned to the Muslim woman in online jihadi communication. All three of these conceptual types of online construction of the Muslim woman's role in jihad are found within all three Danish jihadi Salafi groups.²⁴ Thus the jihadi Salafists are constructing, on their Facebook page or even within the same upload, what seem to be contra-

24. Furthermore no position is particularly dominant. Accordingly, 12 out of 22 uploads in total position the Muslim woman as "mother", 10 position the Muslim woman as "martyr wife" and 12 position the Muslim woman as "mujahida". As noted, one upload may include more than one position.

dictory positions with respect to women's role in jihad: on the one hand, they cite prophetic reports stating that woman's jihad is non-military, and on the other, they cite additional prophetic reports calling on women to fight in defence of Islam.

The question is therefore why these three groups communicate such internally contradictory views on the woman's role in jihad. It is not within the scope of this paper to give a complete answer to that question. However, given that the Danish jihadi Salafists base themselves so clearly in the classical doctrine of defensive jihad, which includes women, they risk losing credibility in relation to their self-positioning as textually rigorous jihadi Salafists (and specifically in relation to their legitimation of defensive jihad) if they exclude women completely from defensive jihad. Another possibility is that, constructing the Muslim woman's role in jihad in different ways may also bring tactical advantage when addressing potential female recruits online. A wide variety of online assigned roles undeniably attracts more online followers. Or the contradictory positions within the question of the Muslim woman's role in jihad may simply reflect disagreements between the individuals behind the official Facebook profiles of these groups.

Common to the seemingly different positions within the Danish jihadi Salafists' construction of the Muslim woman's role in jihad is the discursive construction of the Muslim woman. As highlighted in the paper, the Danish jihadi Salafi groups – particularly within the conceptual type of "the mujahida" – counter-narrate what they term as "the Western perception of the Muslim woman". According to these groups, the Muslim woman is perceived in the West as unintelligent, oppressed, and weak. The Danish jihadi Salafists counter-narrate this perception, constructing the Muslim woman as intelligent, authoritative, and brave, and the success of jihad as depending on the support of women. In line with the theoretical basis of this paper – i.e. that language shapes identities, social relations, and understandings of the world – I argue that the language of the online Danish jihadi Salafi discourse enables the Danish Muslim woman to construct herself as a strong woman, thereby challenging notions of the Muslim woman as the passive victim of subjugation. The Danish jihadi Salafists draw on the available societal discourses and use them strategically in the micro-context of social online interaction. In so doing they allow women to con-

nect their own individual self-perception with the larger narratives of Islam and the strong umma, as well as to narratives based upon free will and authenticity referring to the Quran, the Sunna, and the classic doctrine of jihad.

The paper concludes that while the Danish online jihadi Salafi groups assign three seemingly different roles in jihad to the Muslim woman – mothers, martyr wives, and female jihadi fighters – common to the online construction of all three conceptual types is the online discursive construction of the Muslim woman. Through situational, contextual language, this discursive construction allows female jihadi Salafists to acquire through jihadi Salafism a strong counter-identity to a society in which they are seen as oppressed and possibly even the victims of oppressive, manipulative male ideologies.

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