

Article

Human Rights and British Citizenship: The Case of Shamima Begum as Citizen to *Homo Sacer*

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Abstract

In the post-9/11 context, citizenship in the global North has been reoriented towards the concept of public security. Much of this lay in political rhetoric definitions of who is a threat to the security of a nation state, with a particular emphasis on the ‘threatening Other’. The ‘war on terror’ motivated governments to revoke the citizenship of such persons. In February 2019, the British teenager Shamima Begum was branded as such, and swiftly had her citizenship stripped, which the UK authorities justified as a necessary precaution to protect the nation’s safety. This article asks the core question: how does Britain embed notions of hierarchical human rights, particularly in Begum’s case? The article upholds two key arguments. First, the revocation of citizenship suggests hierarchical notions of humanity, whereby the state’s obligations to its constituents differ depending on each individual’s socially constructed racial and gender identities. Second, the legitimization of exceptionalist security politics suggests the deployment of differentiated conceptions of the state’s obligations to its citizens. The case of the revocation of Begum’s citizenship illustrates how persistent colonialist and stratified conceptions of citizenship enable the demotion of a citizen to a bare human or *homo sacer*.

Keywords: citizenship; counterterrorism; human rights; security state; Shamima Begum; United Kingdom

Introduction

Shamima Begum, one of the ‘Bethnal Green trio’¹ who left Britain to join the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in February 2015, made headline news four years later.

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1 The ‘Bethnal Green Trio’ is a term coined by the British media in reference to the three teenage Bethnal Green Academy students, Amira Abased, Shamima Begum and Kadiza Sultana (all aged

Begum was discovered in the al-Hawl camp in Northern Syria, having left IS territory and pleading to return to Britain to provide her unborn child with a chance of survival and a better quality of life. Shortly after her request to repatriate, the United Kingdom's Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, made an official statement revoking Begum's British citizenship. Javid's decision following Begum's request was pivotal, as Begum was the first-ever British woman stripped of her citizenship, despite the pleas of human rights advocates, Begum's family, and Begum herself. This triggered a wide-ranging debate and raised important questions on citizenship, human rights, and state power: Is it morally legitimate for the British state to revoke the citizenship of a British national under certain conditions? Should the British state revoke the citizenship of its nationals who joined a publicly known terrorist organization abroad? What could be the underlying political logics supporting the British state's revocation of Begum's citizenship? This debate in British and global politics exposes a number of contentious issues we attempt to address, namely the gendered, racial and political logics underlying the security and citizenship discourses in the post-9/11 and post-7/7 British context.

In the post-9/11 security environment, the terms of citizenship were restructured around public security in the United States. Britain followed suit after the 7/7 London attacks in 2005 and continues to juxtapose citizenship with purportedly compelling security considerations. Capitalizing on fears and insecurities regarding terrorism, the state employed the rhetoric of 'Us vs Them', 'with us or against us' as a legitimization of breaching basic human rights (Regilme 2018a, 2018b). Through such rhetoric, groups of people who do not disassociate themselves from terrorism and terrorists—alias 'Them'—have their human rights withheld. This is commonly seen in speeches by politicians extending beyond a local British audience to the regional and global stage. In the British context, key examples come from political leaders, namely Home Secretaries and Prime Ministers. The then Prime Minister David Cameron stated at the 2015 Global Security Forum that whilst Britain stands for the values of human rights, in order to counter terrorism the government gives security services 'all the tools they need' by 'working with the internet industry' (Cameron 2015: para. 36) including spying programmes (BBC News 2014; Gill 2019). The subsequent Prime Ministers, Theresa May and Boris Johnson, and their respective Home Secretaries have also indicated the 'worth' of swapping human rights for security (Mason and Sherwood 2016; Grierson 2019; Walawalkar 2019; Turnbull 2019). Yet it is not merely spoken oratory; rather, it is also apparent within written legislation, for example, the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which aims to restrict freedom of expression in universities as a means of preventing people being drawn into terrorism (UK Government Legislation 2015: s. 31), and the Investigatory Powers Act, which came into the spotlight following the British government utilizing this Act to gain access to private messages after the 2017 Westminster attack.² In Britain, this ever-growing trend of breaching human rights ranges from 'minor' infringements, such as the examples above, to more

between 15 and 16), who in 2015 left the United Kingdom at the same time to join the so-called Islamic State.

2 The Westminster attack occurred on 22 March 2017 outside the Houses of Parliament. A Briton named Khalid Masood drove a rented car into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, crashed the car on the perimeter of the Palace of Westminster, and then stabbed an unarmed police officer who died at the scene. The attack was treated by the police as 'Islamist-related terrorism', and the following day IS announced that the attack was carried out by an IS soldier.

serious infringements such as revocation of citizenship (Macklin 2014: 17; Dearden 2019; Batty and Noor 2019).³

Such discourses are frequently used hand in hand with insinuations towards ethnic and religious minorities (Kabir et al. 2018). Such discriminatory discourses demonstrate how citizenship revocation contains elements of gender discrimination and racism. By identifying the gendered and racialized undercurrent to national identities, this framework enables us to see how Britain embeds notions of hierarchical human rights through the concept of 'Britishness', or what makes a national 'worthy' of British citizenship. In assessing how Britain implements hierarchical human rights on racialized and gendered terms, we adopt an intersectional approach by employing a post-colonial framework with a gendered lens to examine such undertones in the UK government's political discourse on citizenship. A legal positivist approach silences structural issues and depoliticizes the legal system, including the legalities of citizenship. However, the legal system is not an apolitical entity—it is influenced by, or indeed is a product of, political contestations (Regilme 2019). Our approach in this article therefore looks at the intersection of law, society, and politics, by considering the intersectional dimensions of the Begum case which are often muted and neglected. The Begum case is an empirical illustration of how gender, citizenship, and state regulations are contested within the legal system, whilst the legal system remains embedded in broader social contestations. Yet these intersections are ignored by states and those in the legislative branch of government, particularly in the realm of citizenship revocation, which is framed with legalistic and securitization arguments.

The use of such arguments, particularly narratives of national security, was at the heart of the British government's decision to strip Begum of her citizenship. The Begum case is thus a clear example of how citizens from marginalized backgrounds, in this case a combination of an ethnic minority, a girl/woman, a Muslim, and a mother, are not fully taken account of in the legal system. Consequently, more often than not, their welfare, and indeed their human dignity, are being brushed aside by the state security-oriented approach to citizenship. To examine this, we consider the relationship between 'Britishness' and ethnic and religious minorities, while focusing on the role of Muslim women in this context. We highlight how the patently racist framing of 'Britishness' was designed as unattainable for Muslim women, furthering the 'Us vs Them' rhetoric. Adopting a post-colonial-feminist lens allows us to highlight the gendered and racial undertones of a supposedly apolitical legal case. Furthermore, our analysis herein contributes to the scholarly and policy debates on citizenship, human rights, and intersectionality. Whilst there is significant research on racial prejudice in practices of citizenship revocation, due to the number of official Home Office actions against Muslim males (Macklin 2014: 7; Parsons 2014), little is written concerning the intersection of race and gender in regard to Britain's policy on discriminatory citizenship revocation. We address this gap through answering the following research

3 Since 2010, over 150 UK citizens have had their citizenship stripped, around 120 of them since 2016. Macklin (2014: 17) notes that from 2006 to 2014 all but one of the subjects were Muslim males. Recognized names include: British-born-and-raised Mohamed Sakr (citizenship deprivation in 2009); 'The ISIS Beatles', El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexandra Kotey (deprivation in 2018); Mahdi Hashi (deprivation in 2012), to name a few.

question: how does Britain embed notions of hierarchical human rights, particularly in the Shamima Begum case?

Thus, the organizational structure of the paper is as follows. The next section reviews the relevant existing literature on human rights within the fields of citizenship and securitization, with a particular focus on post-9/11 and post-7/7 discourse in Britain. Furthermore, we contribute to academic debates centred on institutional racism in Britain by incorporating a gendered perspective. Following this, we examine the concepts of 'Britishness' and 'Othering', linking these discourses and ideologies to their imperial history. Shifting from the colonial desire of controlling the 'Other', especially veiled Muslim women, the subsequent section explores contemporary methods of controlling the 'Other' through methods of securitization masked as counter-terrorism. Throughout these sections we link the themes to the Begum case utilizing a critical interpretive analysis, assessing themes and discourses surrounding her case with an intersectional approach to uncover the gendered and racialized undercurrents to highlight that citizenship law structurally privileges, and indeed disadvantages, certain demographics of British society. The analysis here draws inspiration from feminist methodologies in the discipline of international relations, which underscores how 'race, ethnicity, and other power relations ... manifest themselves within gender inequalities in global politics' (Ackerly et al. 2006: 4)

Our main argument affirms that the British state's actions in the case of Begum show two key dynamics of state power on citizenship regulation and human rights commitments. First, the state's revocation of citizenship suggests hierarchical notions of humanity as systemically embedded in British culture, whereby the state's obligations to its constituents differ depending on their socially constructed identity, focusing particularly on race and gender. Second, the invocation of a security crisis constitutes the attempt to legitimize exceptionalist measures by reinforcing differentiated conceptions of the state's obligations to its citizens. Hence, when a citizen from a marginalized group is alleged to have deviated from the individual's responsibility to society, the state arbitrarily deploys three notable instruments of control: (1) the vilification of the person's marginalized social identity; (2) the denial of the person's right to due process of the law; (3) and the revocation of full citizenship. Such processes demonstrate contemporary liberal democratic states' inability to escape from their imperial past and contemporary structures of exploitation, even when their constitutional order explicitly guarantees political equality regardless of the individual's background.

Our analysis underscores the imperialist and colonialist foundations of the British state, chiefly by arguing that those elements provided the legal, political and lexical conditions which underpin differentiated and stratified notions of 'Britishness' and 'the Other'. Moreover, we highlight how 'Britishness' becomes unattainable to those who do not fit the dominant gendered and racialized archetype of the British citizen. Here we underscore how British society's construction of the social identity of marginalized groups, branded as 'the Other', signifies a supposed threat to national security and as undeserving of British citizenship. That dynamic becomes more pronounced during a security crisis, as in the case of post-9/11 and post-7/7 Britain, where an exceptionalist security state aggressively promotes a privileged archetypal citizen-model. Through this, the state reinforces hierarchical conceptions of human rights by capitalizing on the fears and insecurities of the privileged majority of British citizens. Hence, the next section discusses the historical relationship between citizenship and rights, particularly in Britain.

Citizenship and rights

Human rights granted through citizenship status have long been a topic of contestation, particularly post-9/11. Historically, [Hobbes \(1651\)](#) and [Locke \(1689\)](#) assert that humans are endowed with specific natural rights subsequently protected by the state through citizenship status. However, various citizenship theorists⁴ counter this idea and maintain that state protection is not a given. It becomes a social contract between the state and the individual, delineating a code of conduct one must follow to maintain citizenship and therefore the rights included within that ‘status’. [Spectar \(2003\)](#) notes that citizenship status not only grants protection, but also bestows a set of rights for the individual, such as legal and socio-political rights and political participation, as well as providing members of that state with a collective identity.

Arendt, on the other hand, presents citizenship at its most basic element: the primary human right, or the right to have rights ([Arendt 1951](#)). She too acknowledges that this fundamental human right is not always bestowed, thus intertwining citizenship and rights with ‘terms and conditions’ of maintaining that ‘privilege’. Arendt expands her argument, emphasizing that as citizenship provides the grounding for all human rights, the loss of citizenship is thereby synonymous with the loss of all rights (*ibid.*). [Agamben \(1998\)](#) builds on Arendt’s contention, referring to the lack of citizenship and deprivation of rights as the *homo sacer*, or bare life. [Agamben \(2000\)](#) writes that the essence of statelessness results in the stateless individual possessing fewer rights than the citizens of nation states. The lack of citizenship and thus transformation from a citizen to bare life, he argues, is indicative of a hierarchical human rights system, allowing room for two ‘forms of life’ and different sets of human rights for different ‘levels’ of people ([Schuilenburg 2008](#): 2).

With citizenship revocation therefore being a deeply political act ([Benhabib 2004](#)), that state action requires some form of legitimation. The need for legitimation comes from the idea that the state’s provision of rights is an act justified not only for the benefit of the individual but also for the collective political body comprising all the members of the state ([Mueller 2004](#): 342). Thus, the notion of national security to protect the masses is a common tactic employed to legitimize this action ([Lavi 2011](#); [Macklin 2015](#); [Mantu 2015](#), 2018). After 9/11, discourses surrounding citizenship shifted heavily to prioritizing state security and sovereignty, and protecting the security of the nation state and the collective safety of citizens was claimed as the basis for launching the ‘war on terror’ ([Stasiulis and Ross 2006](#); [Nasr El Hag Ali 2015](#)). The argument for fighting for ‘the greater good’ of collective safety was presented by politicians advocating for the ‘weeding out’ and barring ‘threatening individuals’ from entering, returning to, or staying in the country ([McKay 2018](#): 292–3; [Lavi 2011](#): 784; [Paulussen and van Waas 2015](#)). A state determining which individuals or factions are worthy of movement to, from, and within a state indicates that there is a hierarchical system of citizenship, and therefore human rights. The post-9/11 political discourses in Western states imply that the rights granted through citizenship of some individuals, namely ‘aliens’, are lesser than the rights of others—evocative of the Orwellian line: ‘all [humans] are equal, but some are more equal than others’.⁵

4 Authors such as [Arendt \(1951\)](#), [Mueller \(2004\)](#), and [Spectar \(2003\)](#) provide good insight into such theories.

5 Adapted from George Orwell’s 1945 novella *Animal Farm*.

Such heightened political discourse as to who is or is not deemed a threat to national security deepened the formation of a two-tier citizenship system (Macklin 2015; Trimbach and Reiz 2018). Intensifying this system in the name of securitization established a method to legally alienate citizens: citizenship revocation (Dobrowolsky 2007; Macklin 2014; Zedner 2016). Practising citizenship revocation under the guise of national security was comprehensively pioneered by the United States following 9/11 through changes in legislation,⁶ and Britain quickly followed suit. The then Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair, announced plans to ‘increase [the British government’s] ability to exclude and remove those whom we suspect of terrorism’ (The Guardian 2001) by amending the British Nationality Act 1981 (Lavi 2011). However, the remodelling of citizenship deprivation regulations was not solely triggered by 9/11. The political and social discussions of British citizenship equated citizenship to a privilege and status which needed to be earned, a process and dialogue which had been evolving due to heightened tensions around topics of multiculturalism, integration, and indeed 2001 race riots in the North of England (Mantu 2018: 32). This context alongside 9/11 triggered the British government to steadily employ vague rhetoric establishing persons that are ‘seriously prejudicial’ to the UK’s ‘vital interests’, a broad term defining national and economic security (ibid.). The terms of citizenship moved from political discourse and debates to legislative action through the addition of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 changing Section 40 of the British Nationality Act allowing for revocation of the citizenship of those matching the vague terms delineated above (ibid.).

However, the vague terminology of the 2002 amendment led to potential statelessness of individuals being the main pushback against a citizenship deprivation order (Mantu 2018: 33). Thus, initiatives for greater powers of deprivation of citizenship were heightened, particularly following 7/7, which triggered the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2005. Mantu notes that this Act was in process prior to the 7/7 attacks, but was streamlined in order to deal with ‘home grown terrorists’ (2018: 33). This new modification made it legal for the Home Secretary to revoke British citizenship when they believed ‘that deprivation is conducive to the public good’ (UK Government Legislation 2006). Such amendments were presented in parliament as a counter-terrorism strategy protecting individuals, ‘our way of life’, and national security (Mantu 2015: 196). However, the issue of rendering a person stateless persisted as a pertinent problem in the face of citizenship deprivation, as seen in the Al-Jedda case.⁷ The British government, struggling to deprive such persons of

6 Seen through post-9/11 legislation, such as the 2001 USA Patriot Act (short for the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001); Homeland Security Act of 2002; 2003 SAFER Act, allowing revocation of citizenship of a US citizen who is overseas; the leaked 2003 Domestic Security Act which included a provision that would strip citizenship from anyone who materially supported (even indirectly) activities of organizations that the executive branch deemed ‘terrorist’; the proposed law however did not reach Congress; 2010 Terrorist Expatriation Act; and 2015 Enemy Expatriation Act.

7 Al-Jedda acquired British citizenship after entering as an Iraqi asylum seeker in 2000. In 2004, he travelled to Iraq and was detained in Baghdad by British forces, claiming he was involved with terrorism. In 2007, shortly before his release without charge, the Secretary of State made an order to revoke his British citizenship on the grounds that deprivation was conducive to the public good (Capel 2013; Mantu 2018: 33–4). Despite this reasoning, Al-Jedda was not deprived of citizenship as he would have become stateless (ibid: 34), in breach of Article 8(1) of the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

their British citizenship, used this case to introduce the 2014 Immigration Act in Parliament to remove the protection against statelessness (Mantu 2018: 34). This move, whilst sparking some debate in parliament, was characterized as necessary in relation to national security, particularly with the rise of Islamic State and radicalized British citizens joining their ranks (ibid.). In 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May re-emphasized this belief, explicitly stating, 'if our human rights laws stop us from [providing police, security and intelligence agencies with the powers they need; deporting terrorist suspects back to their own country; and restricting the movements of terrorist suspects] we'll change the laws so we can do it' (Mason and Dodd 2017).

This resolve of breaching human rights, especially in the form of citizenship revocation, is unremittingly reaffirmed in British politics. Most recently, the Home Secretary at the time, Sajid Javid, reasoned his decision to strip Begum of her citizenship by avowing that '[t]he first duty of the government, and my highest priority as Home Secretary, is to protect the public' (UK Government 2018: 5). This asserted state competency to strip an individual of citizenship ultimately signifies that the state thereafter has no recognized legal duty to protect them outside of its borders (Lavi 2011; Macklin 2014; Zedner 2016). This method of imposing statelessness constitutes a significant breach of Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating everyone is entitled to a nationality, and Article 8(1) of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which declares that states shall not deprive nationality should it render the individual stateless (Adjami and Harrington 2008). However, as seen through the above chronology of amendments to Britain's laws involving citizenship revocation, there is nevertheless room within the Convention allowing for states to revoke citizenship, even if it renders an individual stateless. This is accepted in situations, among others, when a citizen's actions threaten 'the foundations and organization of the state' (UNHCR 2014: para. 67), namely in terms of behaviour(s) or pledging allegiance to another state (Mantu 2018: 30). This notion of a citizen holding the 'power' to pledge allegiance to another state carries weight, particularly through the ways in which citizenship is granted via *jus sanguinis* ('right of blood', that is, citizenship determined by blood relations) or *jus soli* ('right of soil', that is, citizenship determined by place of birth).

Scholars such as Macklin (2007, 2014, 2015), McGhee (2010), Herzog (2011), and Kapoor (2018) highlight how this is a major flaw in the legalistic citizenship system: citizens with 'access' to multiple nationalities due to their *jus sanguinis* are most likely to have their citizenship stripped. Begum's case highlights this issue very clearly. Although she is British by her *jus soli*, Javid argued that she is entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship through *jus sanguinis*, despite the Bangladeshi government similarly disavowing Begum (Addley and Ahmed 2019). Due to citizenship revocation, Begum, like other such individuals, was branded as a foreigner, a terrorist, and an undesirable individual (Macklin 2014: 2–3)—consequently transforming her into the unwanted *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998). Macklin highlights that such persons become victims of 'inter-state games of 'hot potato' played with the bodies of undesirable citizens' (Macklin 2014: 57). This inter-state game is evident in Begum's case, with the Bangladeshi government 'throwing' the responsibility of Begum back to the UK, emphasizing that 'Ms Shamima Begum is not a Bangladeshi citizen[,] she is a British citizen by birth' (Addley and Ahmed 2019). Such undesirability, Herzog argues, is due to a person's *jus soli*, which ostensibly determines affiliation and therefore loyalty to the state (Herzog 2011: 101).

This notion of undesirability due to loyalties is not solely limited to a post-9/11 era. In Britain, citizenship in its legalistic form, as well as the Marshallian definition of citizenship

as being political, civil and social engagement, was previously deeply gendered (Walby 1994), and some argue it continues to be so (Munday 2009; Herzog and Adams 2018; Walby 1994). The gender bias is not limited to the differences of 'masculine'/male exercising rights in the public domain versus 'feminine'/female in the private (Walby 1990, 1994; Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2004; Munday 2009), thereby delineating the 'good' citizen from the 'bad' in both legalistic and Marshallian terms (Walby 1994; Munday 2009; Herzog and Adams 2018). Scholars such as Walby (1990, 1994), Munday (2009), Herzog and Adams (2018) note that the gendering of private and public citizenship plays a role today in producing 'systematic patterns of differential treatment' (Herzog and Adams 2018:16). However, it is the debate on loyalties establishing differential treatment that holds a particular interest in this case, as it is a little-recognized historically gendered aspect of citizenship too. For example, until 1948 any British woman who married a foreigner had her citizenship revoked (Shamsie 2018), whereas this would not happen in the case of men (Herzog and Adams 2018). Whilst this explicit differential treatment between genders ceases to exist, the notion of loyalties and undesirability remain, however, on more evidently racialized terms instead.

The propositions concerning an individual's undesirability emanate from the tendencies of a citizen's shifting allegiance (Shamsie 2018; Herzog 2011). This undesirability traditionally belongs to marginalized groups in British society, such as women, ethnic minorities, and wage workers, rather than men, Caucasians, and property owners, who are deemed active exemplary agents in terms of citizenship (Glenn 2000). Over time, gendered idealizations of citizenship have decreased, and racialized undertones continue to proliferate, thereby ensuring hierarchies of political status in a given political order (Shachar 2009, 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997). This is, once again, due to the discourse of difference between an individual's *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* (Macklin 2007, 2014, 2015; McGhee 2010; Herzog 2011; Kapoor 2018). Herzog (2010, 2011) emphasizes that this is due to states suspecting and classifying immigrants as those most likely to lack loyalty to their 'new' state. Herzog and Adams (2018) build from this notion, explicitly stating that a core element of citizenship revocation is state policy aiming to minimize or eliminate dual citizenship, and therefore reducing multiple national allegiances more generally. Nevertheless, a pertinent question within the complexities of holding dual nationalities from one's *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* is the query around why the British government continues to allow *jus soli* citizenship, unlike many other countries in Europe.

Scholars like Paul (1997) and Joppke (1999) note that a core aspect of this stems from Britain's former empire, whereby the devolution of the empire resulted in an over-inclusive definition of nationality establishing identity based on blood and culture (Paul 1997: 26). Joppke highlights that prior to 1981, Britain had no citizenship but a pre-national concept of subjectship. Thus, with the collapse of the empire and subsequent influx of immigration, Britain was 'devoid of a national citizenship, in which identity coincided with formal nationality' (Joppke 1999: 641). He states that 'this belated introduction of citizenship narrowed rather than widened the circle of those entitled to belong, and that it ethnicized a previously (quasi-)civic definition of political membership' (ibid.), establishing the 'racial group particularism' visible today (ibid: 642). Furthermore, with the movement of former colonial subjects moving to Britain, the British state presumed that they would not become 'British' in any way: whilst being born in Britain determines legal British citizenship, they were not viewed as 'truly' British (ibid.). This non-acceptance caused tensions, leading up to the protests against the police by people from the African-Caribbean community in

Brixton, south London, in 1981, spotlighting issues of minorities' rights into public and political visibility (ibid: 643). This somewhat shifted discourse into establishing an overarching British identity with multiculturalism (Joppke 1999). In an attempt to create a system or method of proving loyalty to Britain within multiculturalism, Britain produced the narrative of 'true shared British values', or 'Britishness' (McGhee 2010), as discussed in the next section.

'Britishness' and 'Othering'

'Britishness' pertains to the British state's narratives and discursive methods of proving a citizen's loyalty to the state and its values. Yet the terms of 'Britishness' only suit a certain prototype, namely white citizens. Furthermore, those who do not fit the epitome of 'Britishness' are branded and presented as 'Other', thus different and even a threat to what it means to be British.

Whilst, as aforementioned, discourse on 'Britishness' and integration was steadily growing from the 1980s onwards, the early 2000s also mark a period of growing tensions in determining British citizenship and 'Britishness' (Mantu 2018: 32). Public and political debates intensified as the wider process of redesigning nationality laws continued (ibid.). British citizenship became depicted as a status to be earned, a discourse that was heightened by the early 2000s context of multiculturalism, (failed) integration and the 2001 race riots (Bosworth and Guild 2008; Tyler 2010). However, McGhee writes that the largest wave of 'Britishness' discourse was initiated after the 7/7 bombings in 2005, responding to the attackers being 'home grown, seemingly integrated members of settled [British] communities' (McGhee 2010: 122). He argues that 'Britishness', rather than being a celebratory term, is rhetoric for identifying what 'type' of person 'lacks' the 'values' of a 'true British citizen', a notion predominantly aimed at minority communities (Kundnani 2007). Such undesirable citizens are often viewed as potential extremists and security threats due to their alleged weak sense of citizenship (McGhee 2010: 6). Kundnani refers to this as 'integrationist racism', stating that this doctrine of community cohesion focuses on the 'need' to integrate Muslims (Kundnani 2007: 121–4, 144). Werbner indicates that this perception of 'needing' to integrate Muslims developed before the 7/7 attacks by British-born-and-raised bombers, and generated a media-led rhetoric of Muslims being 'culturally alien' to the British (Werbner 2000: 307). The rhetoric of 'Britishness' demonstrates the relentless struggle between Britain's historically white cultural, political, legal and ideological heritage and the growing international narrative of multiculturalism (Franceschelli 2016). So much so, that Gordon Brown, who subsequently served as UK Prime Minister, stated in 2006 that formulating 'Britishness' 'requires us to rediscover and build from our history and apply in our time the shared values that bind us together and give us common purpose' (Brown 2006). However, the history of Britain, including its identity-building, is built off the back of a colonial outlook, specifically through the process of 'Othering' (Said 1978: 332; Mitchell 1988: 167–88; Anderson 1991: 167; Berenskoetter 2014: 277).

'Othering' is the act of 'treating people from another group as essentially different from and generally inferior to the group you belong to' (Macmillan Dictionary 2019 (online): 'Othering' definition n.1).⁸ Particularly within identity politics, generating collective and individual identity through the distinction from and discrimination against others formulates the polarization of the Self and the Other, the 'Us vs Them' (Said 1978: 3–9; Mitchell 1988:

8 See Regilme (2016) for the politics of 'Othering' in migration policies.

167–88). Said stresses how the West historically and contemporarily exploits ‘Othering’ as a form of identity-building, especially towards Muslims. He argues that the act of ‘Othering’ in the West is augmented by polarizing rhetoric stemming from Orientalist and colonial ideologies of the Occident versus the Orient. These ideologies established the binary of ‘We’ ‘superior’ white Westerners and ‘Them’ ‘inferior’ non-white ‘Others’ (Said 1978: xvii). Said highlights that the West consistently depicts Arabs, specifically Muslim Arabs, as lesser through multiple methods but especially through political discourse (ibid.). Throughout a long history of ‘Othering’, the West successfully juxtaposed the two sociopolitical cultures as binary opposites. Thus, if historical and contemporary British nationhood is rooted in imagined-and-established colonial thought embedding ‘Us vs Them’ ethno-national narratives, ‘Britishness’ can only ever be inherent to white British people.

When reviewing the case of Shamima Begum and the revocation of her citizenship, there were many instances where the media and politicians used such ‘Othering’ narratives as outlined above. The most explicit narrative is the branding of Shamima Begum as an extreme threat to national security. This portrayal attempted to justify Home Secretary’s decision to strip Begum’s citizenship for the ‘safety and security of Britain and the people who live here’ (UK Home Secretary, cited in Warrell 2019). When addressing Parliament on his decision, Sajid Javid stated that ‘whatever role they took in the so-called caliphate, they all supported a terrorist organization and in doing so they have shown they hate our country and the values we stand for’ (Javid 2019b). It is firstly noticeable that Javid employs ‘Othering’ rhetoric, using the pronoun ‘they’ for British citizens who joined Islamic State, and directly compares ‘them’ to the collective ‘we’. Furthermore, he swiftly refers to ‘Britishness’ and ‘the values we stand for’ being in direct contrast to ‘them’ and ‘their’ views. He emphasizes the contrast between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ by applying hyperbolic emotive language, such as stating that ‘they hate our country’. Using such terminology immediately panders to populist movements and rhetoric (Greenslade 2019). Furthermore, it deepens the colonial-rooted ideology and system of the ‘superior’, ‘civilized’ ‘Us’ and the ‘backwards’, ‘barbaric’ ‘Them’ (Said 1978), entrenching views of ‘Them’ Muslims as an active threat to ‘Us’. These notions are not only held by senior politicians, but are also reflected within the British media following the Begum case. Whilst there has been significant backlash to Javid’s decision by left-wing media sources such as *The Guardian* and the British strand of Al-Jazeera, the majority of British news outlets such as *The Independent*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Sun*, many of which are owned by right-wing/conservative media elites, such as Rupert Murdoch, support Javid’s decision.

Based on the public discourses made by British politicians and elites in the national media, the Begum case reflects wider issues in British society. First, the position of Muslims in the highly stratified British society displays perceptions deeply rooted in Britain’s colonial past. Secondly, following the events of 9/11, 7/7, and the current conflict in Syria, Britain has engrained a hierarchical two-tier system of citizenship rights, favouring those who match ‘white’ notions of ‘Britishness’. This consequently establishes the concept of ‘Britishness’ as having a symbiotic relationship with whiteness (Clarke and Garner 2010). Indeed, Britain has essentially created an atmosphere of ‘legitimately’ excluding those who in ideological, legal, and eventually material respects do not fit this depiction. Therefore, an individual who is ‘Other’ is immediately predisposed as ‘less British’ due to their ethnic background (Kundnani 2007; Smith 2016). This belief is still apparent today, and is frequently seen in political and media narratives emphasizing the purported lack of

'Britishness' and 'British values' which Muslim citizens 'embody'.⁹ Furthermore, while Muslims are expected to assume 'Britishness' above all other minority communities they are supposedly unable to do so due to their non-white ethnicity (Tufail and Cohen 2017).

This expectation for Muslims to assume 'Britishness' extends beyond simply a racialized attempt to control 'the Other'—there is also a gendered slant to it. The 2016 integrationist policies of the Conservative government established a sustained and deliberate targeting of Muslim women (Smith 2016: 303). There were implicit and explicit implications by senior members of the Conservative party, such as Prime Minister David Cameron and the then Energy Secretary, Amber Rudd, emphasizing that a number of Muslim women could not speak English, thus were more susceptible to extremism, abuse, and not promoting/communicating British values (Mason and Sherwood 2016; Smith 2016). It is noteworthy that a significant element of the unattainability of 'Britishness' for Muslims is due to the imperialistic presumption of superiority, which holds the British as 'modern' and 'civilizing' the 'backward Muslim woman' with education to 'meet' and 'communicate' the 'modernized' standard of 'fundamental British values' (Bonnert 2008; Smith 2016; Patel 2017). In addition to this, when Muslims, and particularly Muslim women, openly practise their faith through following Islamic dress codes in public places, it is condemned as a denunciation of 'Britishness' (Meer et al. 2010). British-Muslims are thus expected to reflect their 'true British values' through arbitrary measures, such as wearing a poppy hijab around Remembrance Day¹⁰ to 'combat extremism' (Doyle 2014). The requirement of proving British loyalty and values is chiefly directed at Muslim women who visibly practise Islam by wearing the hijab.

Attitudes towards Muslim women

The hijab has become a highly politicized symbol. It symbolizes views of 'the female Other' as a potential threat to British national identity and security (Edmunds 2012). However, this is not a new phenomenon, as the veil was frequently perceived as threatening by colonizers (Fanon 1965). Ahmed states that Western colonizers branded the hijab as a symbol of oppression, and thus it was used as an open target of colonial attack (Ahmed 1992: 149). Fanon goes deeper into how the hijab is rendered a threat (Fanon 1965). In a chapter titled 'Algeria Unveiled', he states: 'the woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. ... He reacts in an aggressive way before this limitation of his perception. Frustration and aggressiveness, here too, evolve apace. Aggressiveness comes to light, in the first place, in structurally ambivalent attitudes and in the dream material that can be revealed in the European' (ibid: 44). Woldesemait contends that a major reason behind the historical and contemporary 'aggressiveness' towards the hijab is due to the 'mystery' of the veil (Woldesemait 2013: 9). Vivian (1999) argues that this induces a fear in the colonizer and therefore a desire to conquer it, as it acts as a barrier to acquiring information. Vivian expands further, stating that ongoing opinions on the hijab stem from the colonial gaze

9 Examples of media headlines include: 'Jihadist Killers on Our Streets', *Daily Express*, 2014; 'Half of All British Muslims Think Homosexuality Should be Illegal, Poll Finds', *The Guardian*, 2016; 'Islamist School Can Segregate Boys and Girls', *The Times*, 2016.

10 Remembrance Day is informally known as Poppy Day due to the tradition of wearing the remembrance poppy. It is held by Commonwealth member states on 11 November every year following the First World War to commemorate members of their armed forces who have died at war.

viewing women wearing the hijab as ‘victims’ of patriarchy. He, like Fanon, argues that this induces antagonism and a desire to conquer ‘them’ as a means to reveal their inferiority.

Notably, contemporary Western perceptions of the ‘inferiority’ of Muslim women assert that covered Muslim women lack agency. This has frequently been used in political rhetoric, especially post-9/11. The ‘women of cover’ (a term used by George W. Bush, cited in [Safire 2001](#)) became a symbol of oppression and a symbol used by the West to legitimize the ‘war on terror’ ([Abu-Lughod 2002](#): 784). The First Lady of the United States and Cherie Blair in the UK both echoed notions of Muslim women ‘needing’ saving, with Laura Bush stating that, ‘[t]he fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women’ ([Gerstenzang and Getter 2001](#)), followed days later by Cherie Blair’s call to ‘give back a voice’ to Afghan women deprived of human rights ([Ward 2001](#)). These and the other allied Western states were quick to unearth the colonial ideology of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ ([Spivak 1993](#): 93) on the basis that ‘these’ Muslim women were oppressed victims. Yet in the Begum case, this belief is deliberately lacking. In the government’s rhetoric surrounding her plea, the major Conservative party figureheads do not mention victimhood. Rather than addressing Begum as a victim of online grooming ([Segalov 2019](#)); exploitation (*ibid.*); international trafficking (*ibid.*); underage ‘marriage’ ([Gopal 2019](#)); statutory rape (*ibid.*); trauma ([Davies and Ward 2019](#)); and potentially a child soldier ([Jorgensen 2019](#): 5); the government unflinchingly defined her as ‘a real threat’ ([Javid 2019a](#)).

Notably, Begum’s departure to join Islamic State occurred when she was legally defined as a girl, being three years under the legal age of adulthood. Thus, upon joining a foreign fighting insurgency group at the age of 15, her enrolment with IS should classify her as a child soldier. The definition of a child soldier according to the 2007 Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2007) is:

A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes. (See also [UN 2015](#))

A few key elements are noteworthy. Firstly, Begum matches this definition: she was a child below the age of 18 recruited and used by an armed group, including for sexual exploitation purposes, according to her lawyer making her a statutory rape victim ([White 2020](#)). However, the British government did not consider that important contextual condition. This may be due to the fact that the topic of child soldiers has consistently been gendered with very little regard to girl soldiers ([Fox 2004](#)), despite roughly four out of ten child soldiers being girls ([UN 2015](#)). Whilst not addressing the fact that Begum legally counts as a child soldier, the British government rejected Begum’s pleas because, according to the Home Office, she is ‘in Syria because of her own actions; and is detained in a camp run by the (Syrian Democratic Forces) as a direct consequence of her own actions’ ([Hardy 2020](#)). In Sajid Javid’s, Theresa May’s, and the wider Conservative party ranks, the discussions about Begum did not suggest victimhood, grooming, or indeed the former depictions of ‘brown Muslim men oppressing brown Muslim women’. This highlights the double standards in Begum’s case. Firstly, the British government dismissed the argument that Begum is a victim, particularly by defining her instead as an adult, rather than considering her age and situation upon leaving the UK and joining IS. Additionally, she is branded as a

'threat' by the same government, albeit with different Prime Ministers, that implemented policies to 'save', 'civilize' and 'educate' Muslim women. The double standards lie here also: in order to be a 'threat' one must have agency.

This raises the notion of terrorism being a gendered notion, particularly in the form of female agency (Sylvester and Parashar 2009). Women involved in terrorist activities tend to be painted as victims of patriarchy (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007), or agents taking over patriarchy (Auchter 2012), thereby establishing a strict agent/victim dichotomy (ibid: 122). Furthermore, women are depicted as interlopers in a male domain (ibid: 125), convinced by men to join (ibid: 129), but not as her own active agent making the decision herself. The case of Begum distorts such views. Firstly, she was enrolled online by a woman from Glasgow, Aqsa Mahmood, who joined IS in 2013 (BBC News 2015). Secondly, as the government continuously reiterated, the decision was taken by Begum herself to go to Syria, placing the terrorism as an issue of female Muslim agency in her hands. Yet this highlights a juxtaposition within the British state's logic: Muslim women are seen as both the victim and the threat. This poses speculative positioning around the British double standards of Muslim women, seen within the Begum case.

Begum's joining of IS represents her own personal agency, moreover, an agency that has been depicted by the state as one which ceases to exist within Muslim women. By branding her as a 'threat' and the subsequent revocation of her citizenship, female Muslim agency is viewed as a threat to the white secular state's conception of the ideal woman. This also raises notions of securitizing and civilizing narratives: perhaps the state's talk of Begum as a 'security threat' is not actually about a threat to security, but a threat to the state's own conception of what constitutes an agency-driven 'British' woman. Begum does not match the historical and contemporary illustrations of the 'female Muslim victim' that 'needs freeing'; in fact, it could be argued that she frees herself of the state. Yet, when the agency is visibly in her own hands (seen through the decision to join IS on her own terms), she becomes a threat, and upon wishing to return, she receives the ultimate punishment from the state: citizenship revocation.

It can be argued that Begum is a child victim of online grooming and coercion, perhaps not too dissimilar to the girls who were victims of grooming and organized child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, in the north of England, over a period of more than 20 years from the late 1980s, and that like them, she should be worthy of rehabilitation. Moreover, a concrete example of the differential treatment of British IS recruits wishing to repatriate based on race is evident in the case of Jack Letts. 'Jihadi Jack' Letts, 'a white, middle-class boy, from Oxford' (Q. Sommerville 2019), with dual British-Canadian nationality, similarly asked to return to the UK after leaving IS. However, whilst Begum had her citizenship stripped within six days of her request (van Ark 2019), Letts possessed his British citizenship until 18 August 2019, despite his admission that he 'wanted to [commit a suicide bomb attack] in a car' (BBC News 2019a). Additionally, the Home Office have remained quiet on this case (BBC News 2019b), reporting to media sources that '[t]he Home Office does not comment on individual cases' (Townsend 2019), thereby presenting a stark difference to the coverage and policy action Begum received. The notable difference in British state treatment of the similar cases of Letts and Begum emphasizes the preferential state treatment to Letts, a white British-Canadian male, in comparison to Begum, a non-white British-Bangladeshi female. The evident difference in these two cases alone suggests a hierarchy of human rights practised by the British government.

The state's move to revoke Begum's citizenship, and indeed the speed with which it did so, sends a message. Citizenship revocation, in general, sends messages of deterrence to citizens (Keinan and Luzon 2019), but in particular Muslims who make up the majority of cases of citizenship deprivation (Macklin 2015), saying: act in a manner that is disloyal to the state, and harm will be done (Keinan and Luzon 2019: 150). However, it is not simply a message of deterrence; rather, it is an act of control, and particularly, an act to control the 'threatening Other'. In the Begum case, the colonial philosophy of controlling 'the threat of the Other' is perpetrated by the British state today.

Controlling 'the Other'

Contemporary attitudes towards Muslim women echo Britain's Orientalist and colonial ideologies. The colonial and contemporary attitudes uphold narratives of controlling 'the Other' as a means to reinforce the fiction of Western superiority as the dominant, 'civilized' culture over the 'backwards Islamic' one (Said 1978). This desire for dominance extended into controlling bodies through narratives of clothing, in particular veiled women, as backward, a threat and in need of civilizing and/or saving (Abu-Lughod 2002: 784; Ansari 2011: 83; Woldesemait 2013: 23–4). Deep-seated colonial 'aggressiveness' and the desire to control (veiled) women's bodies continue to dominate in Western collective imagination. Examining contemporary political discourse regarding women wearing the hijab, niqab, or burka reveals how they are unremittingly referred to in dehumanizing and criminalizing language. Recently, for example, the former Foreign Secretary and current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, referred to veiled Muslim women as 'letter-boxes' and compared them to 'bank robbers' (Johnson 2018). Furthermore, mainstream political discourse frequently labels Muslim women as a security threat depicting their veils as a symbol of an 'increasingly divided Britain' (Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), cited in Kirkup 2010). Such language used by political elites in Britain highlights how colonial and imperial ideological discourse on the hijab dominate current discourses suggestive of the British political establishment's propensity to controlling the 'threatening Other'.

Britain's attempt at controlling Muslim women extends beyond control in the public sphere and into the private sphere through the use of surveillance. The (mostly technological) tool of governmental and intelligence surveillance is used on the general public with a 'focused attention to personal details for the purposes of influence, management, care, and control' (Lyon 2006: 403). Notably, this process is promoted under the guise of counter-terrorism and securitization (ibid; O'Neill and Loftus 2013). In the post-9/11 context, securitization is considered the most efficient method of counter-terror strategies by the West. Securitization, a term used by Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, refers to a state's reaction to an existential threat requiring actions outside the normal limits of political procedure (Buzan et al. 1998: 23–4; Regilme 2018a, 2018b). Securitization in this environment focuses more on the terms of citizenship. Specifically, the transformation of specific individuals and their affiliated communities into national security concerns justifies exceptionalist methods of the security state to ensure the supposed welfare of 'ordinary' citizens (Midtbøen 2019: 10). Authors such as Macklin (2007) and Nyers (2009) note that such securitization edges into the realms of citizenship legislation, namely that of citizenship revocation applied as a deterrent. The heart of securitization relies on exceptionalist politics, which discursively yet untruthfully frames state surveillance practices as unusual rather than publicly conceding that they have become the norm (Neal 2006: 31; Neal 2010; van

Munster and Aradau 2009: 688; Lister 2018; Huysmans 2011). Huysmans states that exceptionalist politics draws a sharp distinction between the ‘norm’ and the moments of existential threat (Huysmans 2011: 375). In the British context of security narrative, a large contribution towards this is through the discourses and policies of the British security state.

The leading security apparatus in Britain is conducted through the Home Office’s ‘CONTEST’ strategy, a counter-terrorism project that ‘is built on an approach that unites the public and private sectors, communities, citizens and overseas partners around the single purpose to leave no safe space for terrorists to recruit or act’ (UK Government 2018: 7). The largest initiative within CONTEST is the Prevent campaign. Similar to US security strategies (see Priest and Arkin 2011), the Prevent campaign delivers vast spending on counter-terrorism through collaboration with government departments, local authorities, community organizations, and, indeed, private contractors (UK Government 2015). Although the Home Office claims the funding is divided between tackling far-right radicalization and Islamic radicalization (UK Home Office 2018), many note the evident bias against Muslims (Lewis 2010; Davies 2015; Versi 2017; Tufail and Cohen 2017). This bias once again occurs through rhetoric, and re-emphasizes that apparently the ‘key measure of success[fully countering Islamic terrorism] will be demonstrable changes in attitudes among Muslims, and wider communities they are part of, locally and nationally’ (UK Department for Communities and Local Government 2007: 7).

The securitization of Muslims, and in particular surveillance, features a gendered slant. This is expressed by outward displays of gendered securitization of Muslim women, political discourses and deeply rooted colonial ideologies viewing ‘the Other’ as disposed to ‘backwardness’. This ‘backwardness’ is symbolized by rhetoric surrounding the veil implying Muslim women are innately susceptible to fall ‘victim’ to patriarchy and violence, and are consequently viewed as a silent threat. Moreover, they are purported to be inherently ‘Other’ to ‘Britishness’ and ‘British values’. Their ‘Otherness’ allegedly infiltrates and undermines the nation by raising their children, generating fears expressed in contemporary discourse that this intrinsic ‘denunciation’ of ‘Britishness’ will filter into the next generation. This, perhaps, is a key factor contributing to the decision to strip Shamima Begum of British citizenship, and rendering both her (and her child) enemies of the state.

Feminist scholars note that states implement systemic materialist means of control and domination through the establishment of gendered roles and gendering conceptions in identity- and nation-building (Anderson 1991; Mies 1998; Yuval-Davis 1996, 1997). In the West the place and role of women in society has regularly been contested (M. Somerville 1995; Mies 1998). The female body has been used as a symbol of control in regard to nation-building, as the gender role placed upon women is that of the reproducer of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1996, 1997; Kanaaneh 2002). However, the woman is not merely constructed as a biological reproducer; she is also at the heart of cultural reproduction, therefore creating cultural constructions of social and collective identities, along with cultural conflicts and contestations (Yuval-Davis 2003: 16). Thus, when a British-born child gains British citizenship based on their *jus soli*, but is raised by a mother with a ‘different’ nationality due to their *jus sanguinis*, both the mother and child are deemed a threat to the nation. The ‘Otherness’ of the mother’s cultural norms, behaviours, values, ideas, consciousness, emotions and perceptions of society are identified as a threat (Qurashi 2018). As the environment the child is raised in is viewed as ‘unfit’, ‘different’, and ‘Other’ to the nation’s dominant culture, behaviours, practices and ideologies, it is deemed in need of controlling (ibid.). Thus, the state–society nexus attempts to control and co-opt behaviours and

practices of women to ensure the culture they are reproducing reflects the dominant notion of 'Britishness'. This notion of controlling the 'Other' in terms of motherhood is certainly an aspect which plays into Begum's case. At the time of Begum's original plea to repatriate, she was pregnant with her unborn child, who would have had the right to British citizenship through *jus sanguinis*. In fact, Begum's plea to repatriate was framed for the purpose of giving her child a better quality of life than the two children she previously had, who had passed away in IS-occupied territories. The fact that the British government revoked Begum's and her newborn child's citizenship emphasizes the underlying notion of Begum's 'Otherness' as a mother, and the reluctance to provide an innocent child with citizenship and safety, due to the above colonial ideologies of the 'Other' equating to an 'unfit' mother.

The underlying depicted inadequacies of Begum appear to be solely about counter-terrorism practices to 'assure' national security and safety of the British collective. Yet our analysis suggests that Begum has fallen victim to a current trend, deeply rooted in colonial thinking, to prioritize the security of 'the nation' over the rights of the individual. Perceptions of British non-white Muslims as 'Other' and therefore 'unsafe' compared with 'Britishness' regarded as 'safe' are contributing to this discourse. Neither the UK nor Bangladesh (Begum's alleged second nationality) recognizes her right to a nationality. Both Shamima Begum and the British state's professed international human rights obligations are casualties of deep-seated notions of differentiated and stratified types of citizenship and humanity, which reflect colonial and imperialist thinking in the contemporary state–society nexus.

Conclusion

The Shamima Begum case sparked controversy not only within Britain but also at the international level. Whilst citizenship constitutes a foundational requirement for accessing basic human rights guaranteed by states, British government officials present a different view. The post-9/11 'war on terror' motivated governments to revoke the citizenship and to undermine the human rights claims of their constituents from minority backgrounds. Although rendering a person stateless through citizenship revocation is a breach of human rights, the British government deploys dehumanizing discourses to legitimize this move. This is predominantly established through 'Othering' narratives of 'Us vs Them', 'with us or against us', presenting 'Us' as embodying 'Britishness' and 'true British values'. We contend that not only is such a discourse strategy racialized, but it is also blatantly gendered due to the nuances within such rhetoric. Furthermore, these xenophobic narratives stem from Britain's colonial past, presenting Muslims as 'the Other' in need of 'civilizing'. This is the case when one examines British attitudes towards veiled Muslim women, discernible through political and media discourses mirroring colonial aggression and fear towards the hijab. We also highlight that fear-inducing discourses surrounding terrorism present a gendered aspect due to the gendered roles of women in society. Constructed as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, Muslim women are presented as in 'need' of securitization so as to reinforce the state's regulative powers over 'their' communities. As shown in the discourses pertaining to Begum's case, notions of controlling 'the Other' are rooted in colonial ideologies. The Shamima Begum case undermines the value of individual rights against the perceived (security) needs of the collective nation. Her case illustrates that colonial ideologies persist in the contemporary British state, which superficially avows its international human rights obligations to all of its constituents regardless of their race and

gender. The remnants of colonial ideology reflecting ‘Us vs Them’ narratives, especially directed towards veiled Muslim women, reveal that Britain not only entrenches notions of a two-tiered system of citizenship and human rights (or the lack thereof), but also implements it through political exclusion, dehumanization, and the state’s abdication from promoting the welfare of all its citizens. The revocation of Begum’s citizenship demonstrates the forced political exclusion of a citizen from her political community without any recourse to procedural fairness and without any substantive justice.

Indeed, citizenship, as guaranteed by states, remains the quintessential political status that makes human rights tangibly accessible to natural human persons. Notably, citizenship revocation appears to be gaining traction in the global North, as demonstrated by the Trump administration in the United States, where denaturalization processes have systematically targeted persons of colour on the basis of mere procedural mistakes. Such revocation initiatives illustrate how enduring colonialist and stratified conceptions of citizenship and political membership enable the demotion of a citizen to a bare human or *homo sacer*. For that reason, human rights activists must fight against any form of state policy or societal demand for revocation of citizenship.

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