Constructing radicalisation, gender, and free will: An analysis of SIAC decision in the Shamima Begum case

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Abstract

This article critically examines SIAC's discussion of the Shamima Begum case and her swift categorisation as a national security threat, which led to the revocation of her citizenship. It argues that the Secretary of State's assessment of the level of risk she poses, as well as SIAC's long discussion about her free will when she joined ISIS, fails to adequately account for the intersection of age, gender, and ethnicity in evaluating her case. An intersectional approach would have facilitated an understanding of the structural and gendered roots of the problem and provided a more effective framework for addressing the radicalisation of young women. Rather than offering new insights into minors joining ISIS, this case strengthens the gender narratives through which Shamima has been constructed, reinforcing simplistic Orientalist binaries which reproduce patriarchal narratives and dehumanise depictions of Muslim women. This, in turn, results in policies that ignore the complexities of young women's radicalisation and lead to discrimination and human rights violations.

Keywords: Shamima Begum, gender and radicalisation, free will/autonomy, risk assessment.

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Introduction

In February 2015, three fifteen-year-old girls, Shamima Begum[1], Amira Abase, and Kadiza Sultana, travelled from London to Syria to join the newly established Islamic State (ISIL or ISIS). Despite appeals for their return, they seemed to vanish. In 2019, after ISIS's fall, a journalist found Shamima in a refugee camp in northern Syria, where ISIS women and children were detained and guarded by the Kurdish forces who had defeated ISIS. Shamima requested to return to the UK. However, the then British Home Secretary Sajid Javid immediately stated that she would never be allowed back. Shamima's family brought a case whose verdict confirmed the Secretary of State's decision to strip her of her British citizenship. An appeal was then made to the Special Immigration Appeal Commission (SIAC)[2], which declared the Secretary of State's decision lawful. The legal procedures pertaining to the deprivation of Shamima Begum's citizenship are marked by a complicated interplay of national security concerns, legal principles, and human rights considerations which have been widely analysed (Brown, 2020; Masters & Regilme Jr, 2020). What I found worth noting in this case is the quick categorisation of Shamima as a threat to national security, which led to the revocation of her citizenship. In the SIAC proceeding, this categorisation was based on the assessment of the intelligence agency advising the Secretary of State and a long discussion about the free will, or voluntariness, of Shamima, as this was deemed to be of paramount importance in determining the level of national security risk she posed (EWCA Civ, para 98).

This article offers an analysis of this discussion, and argues that the swift categorisation of Shamima Begum as a national security threat reveals limitations in the UK's approach to young female radicalisation, particularly regarding the intersection of age, gender, and ethnicity in assessing her voluntariness and the level of risk she poses. Had SIAC and the Secretary of State adopted an intersectional approach, which recognises and analyses the multidimensionality of social relations that shape individuals' lives and social systems (Olofsson et al., 2014), it would have facilitated an understanding of the structural gendered and racialised roots of the problem and provided a more effective framework for addressing the radicalisation of young women.

As I shall argue, while for SIAC the Secretary of State is best placed to judge the level of risk Begum poses, the discussion focused on Shamima's voluntariness when she joined ISIS. However, SIAC failed to understand that choices made by underage individuals, such as the decision to join groups like ISIS, are influenced by psychosocial, cultural, and environmental factors, including social influence, psychological manipulation, and immediate surroundings (Ramakrishna, 2016; Vale, 2019), which should be taken into consideration when assessing Shamima's voluntariness. Recognising the importance of these factors challenges the liberal

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[1] For stylistic reasons, in this article I will use Begum or Shamima.

[2] The Special Immigration Appeals Commission, a superior court established by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act 1997, adjudicates cases involving the Secretary of State's statutory powers to deport or exclude individuals from the UK and appeals against citizenship revocation decisions under the British Nationality Act 1981.

notion of autonomy employed in the case. Feminist scholarship has shown that the liberal concept of personal autonomy presupposes an "atomistic" or "abstract individual" who is inherently independent and self-reliant, implying that individuals can transcend social influences (Barclay, 2000). However, this perspective neglects the inescapable interconnectedness of individuals and the fact that their participation in relational networks shapes their desires, goals, and even identities (MacIntyre, 2013; Sandel, 1998). I suggest rethinking Shamima's story through the feminist notion of relational autonomy, which conceptualises autonomy as contingent upon, rather than opposed to, interpersonal relations (Hirschmann, 2008), showing that a different understanding of autonomy could have favoured an intersectional approach. Intersectionality and relational autonomy are intertwined in that intersectionality focuses on categories of differences in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies, and on the outcome of these interactions in terms of power. Similarly, relational autonomy supports an intersectional approach by emphasising that people's ability to make autonomous choices is shaped by their relationships and social conditions, which are deeply influenced by overlapping factors, such as race, gender, class, age, and other identities. Recognising these intersectional factors is crucial, as it challenges the simplistic narrative of voluntary participation embedded in the justice system and underscores the need for a more nuanced legal and policy approach that accounts for the specific vulnerabilities faced by women in terrorist organisations. In the case, by failing to take into consideration the many factors that influenced Shamima's choices, SIAC failed to recognise the age and gendered-racialised root of terrorism and how female agency is involved.

An intersectional approach also seems to be missing in the risk assessment tools with which, presumably, Shamima was assessed. In the UK, the definitions of terrorism and national security are interpreted broadly, with the executive branch having the sole authority to decide whether certain actions fit within its wide definition of terrorism. Researches indicate that Extremism Risk Guidance and other risk assessment tools in use in the UK lack an intersectional perspective (Augestad Knudsen, 2020), which could enhance risk research by effectively integrating social categories like gender, age, and race into the empirical analysis of 'risk' (Olofsson et al., 2014). Intersectionality is vital for understanding the social construction of risk and inequality (Olofsson et al., 2014), as it rejects the notion of isolating a single category as the determinant of risk and understands overlapping dimensions of inequality as constitutive of risk. This framework is especially relevant in evaluating national security decisions such as the Begum case, where it is arguable whether, in just a few days, the Home Secretary was able to analyse and capture how power, culture, and identity intertwined to shape Shamima's choices and to assess the level of risk she poses. Rather, the Begum case seems to be based on racialised stereotypes of Muslim women who join ISIS, exemplifying the ethnic and gender biases inherent in the legal and political frameworks that guide national security decisions (Olofsson et al., 2014).

Indeed, Shamima Begum's case underscores the need for an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to understand radicalised female minors. A critical analysis of factors such as socio-political structures, including Islamophobia, gender-based violence, and geopolitical ruptures would make sense of Shamima's story and reveal the complex interplay of agency and vulnerability, disrupting the simplistic Orientalist binary of villain/victim, often applied to Muslim women (Kapoor, 2019). By failing to adopt an intersectional approach and focusing mainly on closed materials[3] and Shamima's possibility of agency, this case reinforces patriarchal narratives that depict young Western women who join ISIS as inherently evil (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). The portrayal of Muslim women, shifting from victim to threat, has been accompanied by a dehumanising depiction of Begum (Williamson & Khiabany, 2024) which follows the reworking of Muslims as a "terror threat" in the UK, prioritising "national security" over citizens' rights (Williamson & Khiabany, 2024). Citizenship now depends on loyalty to the state, punishing conduct against 'British values' (Birdsall, 2024). By joining ISIS, Begum crossed the line between "us" and "them", becoming an "enemy of the state", justifying actions against her (Birdsall, 2024). These gendered narratives, which are at play in the Begum case, show a failure to recognise the gendered roots of terrorism and female agency, and also that dehumanising discourses can restrict acceptable options and shape policies that ignore victimhood, discrimination, and rights (Evans & Da Silva, 2023; Jackson, 2021). This, in turn, raises questions about the government's capacity to properly address the issue of female radicalisation and the court's ability to adequately protect individual rights. Rather than offering new insights into minors joining ISIS, the case reinforces the gender narratives through which Shamima has been constructed, resulting in policies that ignore the complexities of young women's radicalisation and lead to discrimination and human rights violation.

The "Bethnal Green Girls"

In January 2014, Sharmeena Begum's[4] mother died of cancer and her father started a relationship with another woman, who later became his second spouse (Bennhold, 2015). Sharmeena had not been exceptionally religiously devout: "she hardly ever practiced religion before", remarked one individual who was familiar with the family (Bennhold, 2015). However, after her mother's death, she began to pray consistently and dedicated more time to the mosque. Sharmeena's closest friends, Shamima, Khadiza and Amira, also started to change (Bennhold, 2015). Khadiza stopped wearing trousers and began covering her hair after the summer vacation. At first, she only did so at school, but over time, she began to do it at home

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[3] This implies that both the public and the defendant are not informed about the evidence. However, this situation complicates the appeal process and may have violated Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

[4] Sharmeena Begum has no familial ties with Shamima Begum.

as well. Around the same time, their school friends observed a change in the girls' lunchtime conversations. In December 2014, shortly after Sharmeena's father's wedding to his new partner, she disappeared. Her friends did not inform their family that Sharmeena had run away. A school staff member contacted the friend's family to report that Sharmeena was missing, but did not specify that she was believed to have travelled to Syria (Bennhold, 2015).

When Sharmeena disappeared, the school conducted an assessment of Shamima, concluding that "due to her friendship tie with the student who left the UK recently, we have identified her to be at risk herself. The risk is that she can also be encouraged to leave her family, and possibly the UK. The additional risk is that she will go to Syria" (Baker, n.d.). An officer tried to contact Shamima and her closest friends, but they did not respond to his calls or messages. The officer asked the school to organise meetings with the girls: two meetings were held, one with the deputy principal and the other with a teacher. However, the officer did not find any signs of vulnerability or radicalisation, and neither the school nor the police notified the families (Bennhold, 2015). On February 5th, officers provided letters to the girls, requesting their parents' consent to make formal statements regarding Sharmeena's disappearance. However, the girls failed to pass these letters to their parents. Khadiza's letter was found hidden in her textbooks by her sister after they had left. Eventually, the police issued an apology expressing regret that the letters had never reached the parents: "in hindsight, we recognise that the letters could have been delivered directly to the parents" (Bennhold, 2015).

On the 17th of February 2015, the three girls flew to Istanbul. The day after, Wednesday morning, they were declared missing. According to sources, they waited for eighteen hours at a bus station in an Istanbul suburb before eventually crossing the border into Syria on the Friday. Critics have pointed at both the British and Turkish police regarding their response time in relation to the disappearance of the girls (Bennhold, 2015).

For some time, the girls were nowhere to be found. In January 2019, the self-proclaimed caliphate established by ISIS finally came to an end following a series of military setbacks, and news about the girls started to emerge. All the girls were married off a few days after their arrival in Syria. Sultana Khadiza died in an explosion, Sharmeena Begum managed to flee, and has since been actively working to raise funds for other ISIS members, while the fate of Amira remains unknown. Shamima Begum had three pregnancies during her four years in ISIS controlled territories, and all of her children died (Howard, 2024). In 2019, Shamima and her husband escaped to the last remaining stronghold of ISIS in Baghuz, where they subsequently surrendered and were captured by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that defeated ISIS. Shamima Begum was then taken to the Al-Hawl camp in northeastern Syria, where she was found by a British journalist. At that time, she was pregnant with her fourth child (who would die after a few weeks) and asked the British government to let her return to the UK, given the difficult situation in the camp. Although at the time of their disappearance the Metropolitan Police's Assistant Commissioner, Mark Rowley, emphasised that the girls, should they return

would not be classified as terrorists, only one day after Shamima's first interview the then Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, revoked her British citizenship, highlighting that she would never be allowed to return to the UK (Wyatt, 2019). He asserted that that Begum's prosecution in the United Kingdom would present significant challenges due to the inadequacy of applicable legislation and the complexities associated with gathering sufficient evidence to secure a conviction (Birdsall, 2024).

Balancing national security and human rights: The Shamima Begum case

Shamima's family brought a case to the Immigration Tribunal, which confirmed the Secretary of the State's decision to strip her of British citizenship. In 2020, the Court of Appeal ruled that she should be permitted to return to the UK to have a fair trial and contest the Home Secretary's decision. However, in February 2021, the UK Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Court of Appeal, upholding the decision of the Secretary of State to strip her of British citizenship, based on the fact that since she is the descendant of a Bangladeshi family, she could ask for Bangladeshi citizenship[5], despite being born and having lived in the UK for all her life. However, Bangladesh clearly stated that it would not accept her request for citizenship, and Shamima is now *de facto* stateless[6].

An appeal was then made to SIAC, which declared the Secretary of State's decision lawful. For SIAC (2023), while "there is a credible suspicion that Ms Begum was recruited, transferred, and then harboured for the purpose of sexual exploitation" (para 219), "[she] must […] show that the exercise of section 40 power amounts to a breach of her rights under Article 4 of the ECHR [Prohibition of slavery and forced labour]. A credible suspicion that she was trafficked does not, in and of itself, amount to a violation of Article 4" (para 227). Indeed, "the state may have failed in its duties to Ms Begum before she travelled to Syria, but she is now well beyond the scope of this protection" (para 238). SIAC's judges pointed out that the Secretary of State was aware of Ms. Begum's age, her journey to Syria as a minor, and the policy he had approved four days earlier[7], which considered her a victim of radicalisation at an age where she could

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[5]According to the Bangladesh Citizenship Act of 1951, citizenship is granted by descent but is revoked at the age of 21 if dual nationality exists. The UK government used this provision to argue that Begum was not legally stateless, even though Bangladesh refused to recognise her (Birdsall, 2024).

[6] Denying nationality violates Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 8(1) of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which prohibits states from causing statelessness (Adjami & Harrington, 2008). However, amendments to UK laws have increasingly marginalised the judiciary by granting the executive broad powers to revoke citizenship without meaningful recourse. Key legislation, including the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, the Immigration Acts of 2006 and 2014, and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, have expanded the Home Secretary's authority to deprive individuals of citizenship if deemed a threat to national interests, often without prior notification or the need for alternative nationality (Birdsall, 2024).

[7] The "minors' policy" was approved by the Secretary of State on the 14th of February 2019. The document starts with the sentence "NOTE our starting position that we consider minors assessed to have been radicalised to be vulnerable victims." Article 4 provides that "[w]e accept that individuals who have been radicalised as minors and travelled to Syria or Iraq, …are first and foremost victims. It is possible that some of these individuals may be self-

not be held fully responsible (per para 4 of the policy). However, based on SIAC, the Secretary of State and its advisors are the only ones entitled to determine whether Ms. Begum still represents a risk to UK security. Ultimately, despite the long discussion about Shamima's voluntariness, SIAC concluded that the assessment of Ms. Begum's voluntary travel could not be challenged based on administrative law principles in the appellate proceedings[8].

It is important to note that SIAC has frequently taken different stances from the Home Secretary on issues related to security and human rights. In the case of *Abid and others v The Secretary of State for the Home Department* (2010), SIAC decided to prevent the deportation of suspected terrorists to Pakistan due to the possibility of torture, even though diplomatic assurances had been provided. However, more recent cases have shown that SIAC has increasingly relied on the Home Secretary's assessments of national security, as demonstrated in the case of *The Secretary of State for the Home Department v P3* (2021), in which the Court of Appeal agreed with the Home Secretary that a specialist court could not independently evaluate national security (Prabhat, 2023). Although in the Begum case SIAC acknowledges the significance of the principles, rights, and obligations at stake, it appears that national security takes precedence over these concerns, and the court's ability to scrutinise the Home Secretary's evaluation of the security situation is limited (Prabhat, 2023).

Begum's lawyer sought a judicial review of SIAC's decision at the Court of Appeal Civil Division (EWCA, 2024). The appeal was based on various grounds. First, under Article 4 of the ECHR, the Secretary of State must evaluate factors before revoking citizenship, including whether the individual is a trafficking victim, whether the state has failed to protect them, the legal obligations owed to them, and the impact of deprivation on fulfilling these obligations. Ignoring these factors violates Article 4 of the ECHR, rendering the Immigration Act 2014's evaluation incorrect. Second, the issue of trafficking is essential for evaluating the justification and proportionality of revoking Ms. Begum's citizenship. As the Secretary of State ignored this aspect, the deprivation of citizenship was deemed illegal and SIAC's assessment was faulty. Third, the revocation of Ms. Begum's citizenship by the Secretary of State resulted in her *de facto* statelessness, as her *de jure* Bangladeshi citizenship was practically ineffective, rendering her unable to access the rights and protection of citizenship–a crucial issue identified by SIAC but erroneously deemed properly considered[9].

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motivated but that may be difficult to establish and so our presumption is that in most if not all cases, the individual will have been manipulated or radicalised at some stage". In contrast, art. 19 states that "[w]here a minor has now reached the age of majority but there is a national security case against them to justify deprivation and that is based on their actions as a minor, we will recommend deprivation" (in EWCA 2024, para 98).

[8] The Home Secretary personally decides citizenship deprivation cases based on Intelligence Service recommendations, without requiring criminal charges or due process. With limited opportunities for appeal and restricted access to information due to national security claims, concerns have been raised about the subjective nature of these decisions, as there is no requirement for objectively reasonable grounds (Birdsall, 2024).

[9] Based on sec. 40 of the British National Act 1981, the Secretary of State may revoke a person's citizenship if deemed beneficial to the public good, but cannot do so if it results in statelessness. However, this restriction does not apply if the Secretary of State reasonably believes the individual can acquire nationality in another country or territory outside the UK.

The Court of Appeal ruling determined that Ms. Begum was outside the UK's jurisdiction and control when her citizenship was revoked (EWCA, 2024). Hence, there was no ECHR obligation to repatriate her in 2015, 2019, or later. For the court, an individual who poses a risk to national security should not be repatriated, and the Secretary of State is not obligated to consider her repatriation to fulfil its obligations under the protective duty, the recovery duty, or the investigative duty. Moreover, for the court, the non-punishment principle[10] does not extend to a decision to revoke her citizenship on national security grounds and no restitutionary duty exists under these circumstances. Finally, the judiciary determined that SIAC, as the expert tribunal established by Parliament, possessed the authority to conclude that the matter of whether and to what extent Ms Begum's journey to Syria was voluntary fell within the purview of the intelligence agencies advising the Secretary of State. As SIAC (2023) said, "in the Commission's experience many national security assessments require an understanding of human nature, and the context of the present case is terrorism and national security" (para 285). Hence, the court's deliberation did not focus on determining whether Shamima was a victim of trafficking or posed a threat; instead, it concentrated solely on the legality of the government's decision. The decision was deeply criticised by UN experts, as "Begum remains stripped of her citizenship, vulnerable, and denied assistance and protection as a possible victim of trafficking" (OHCHR, 2024).

The revocation of Shamima Begum's citizenship by UK authorities presents a complex challenge in reconciling national security with human rights. While the European Court of Human Rights emphasises the need for a balance between these two competing interests (Jing, 2023), the UK's decision to revoke Begum's citizenship was justified on the basis of public safety, reflecting a prioritisation of national security over individual rights (Masters & Regilme Jr, 2020). The UK's actions have been challenged for not aligning with international legal obligations and for contributing to a stratified system of citizenship that may undermine human rights protections (Masters & Regilme Jr, 2020). Critiques have also been moved towards the use of closed materials in the case. While some governments consider closed material procedures to be an essential compromise to safeguard sensitive information while still upholding justice (Krebs, 2013), this practice raises substantial concerns about the fairness and transparency of the judicial process. It undermines the adversarial process and potentially biases judges towards prioritising national security over fairness and due process (Van Harten, 2009). The Begum case highlights the tension between national security and the principle of justice, revealing a significant gap between theoretical commitment to fair trials and the reality of their implementation when secret evidence is involved. The decision to revoke

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[10] Article 26 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) provides that "[e]ach party shall, in accordance with the basic principles of its legal system, provide for the possibility of not imposing penalties on victims for their involvement in unlawful activities, to the extent that they have been compelled to do so".

Begum's citizenship based on "closed material", which she and her legal team could not access effectively, hindered her ability to challenge the government's claims.

Who is to blame? Minors, agency, and gender expectations

While Shamima could not be assessed by any expert because she was forbidden from entering the country[11], SIAC was satisfied with the decision of the Secretary of State that she still posed a risk to UK security based on closed material. However, strangely enough, most of the legal proceedings held at SIAC focused on Shamima's agency and degree of voluntariness, as it was considered "clearly relevant to the question of national security risk" (EWCA, para 98).

The first issue discussed was whether Shamima, at the age of 15, travelled voluntarily to Syria. While Shamima's various interviews presented many inconsistencies and a lack of appropriate contextual information, for SIAC (2023) she had "travelled voluntarily to Syria, demonstrat[ing] determination and commitment in doing so" (para 134). Based on SIAC, Shamima has chosen consciously to travel to Syria since a) she was a bright student and thus understood what she was doing; b) prior to her trip, she actively searched the internet for information about ISIS; and c) she stole her older sister's passport to travel to Syria. For the defending lawyer, the link between "academic potential on the one hand and judgment, maturity and common sense on the other" (para 173) is unclear, pointing out that Shamima was a victim of trafficking and manipulation (para 148-9). This was highlighted by Dr Michael Korzinski, an expert in trauma and trafficking: "the adolescent brain continues to undergo neurological development and […] someone in Ms Begum's position was especially vulnerable" (para 166). To strengthen this point, Mr. Steve Harvey, a former police officer and independent consultant on trafficking, submitted that

> *individuals being trafficked for forced labour, especially in the early stages of the process, are often unaware that they are being trafficked, or indeed exposed to any kind of risk or danger. The recruiter (a trafficker) ensures through preparation of the individual, that they feel safe and confident with the proposal or offer they have accepted. It is my professional experience that victims of trafficking have little or no concept of what they will actually be engaged in* (SIAC, 2023, para 166)[12].

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[11] Judicial decisions made without the accused or based on vague criteria undermine the fairness and legitimacy of the process, jeopardizing the fair trial principle essential to the rule of law and individual rights protection (Hawamdeh, 2018).

[12] Shamima declared that she was groomed for "weeks and weeks and maybe even months and months. It wasn't just a decision I made very quickly, it was a decision I thought about for a while"(Bunkall, 2021).

However, while SIAC acknowledges the validity of the argument that individuals who have been groomed, radicalised, and trafficked may not fully comprehend or process all of the events that have occurred, it highlighted that this argument cannot be applied universally or absolutely.

Here, SIAC failed to take into account the UN Trafficking Protocol (2000) which grants protection to children who have been trafficked. According to the Protocol (2000), trafficking is defined as the recruitment or receipt of persons, through the use of threat, force, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation of vulnerability, for the purpose of exploitation. If threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception is used to obtain consent, then the consent of the victim is irrelevant. More importantly, if a child under the age of 18 is exploited in such a manner, the act constitutes trafficking in persons, regardless of whether any coercive or deceptive means have been employed (UN Trafficking Protocol, 2000, art. 3 (c) (d)): hence, coercion and/or fraud are not required where a child is involved. The Protocol (2000) intends "to punish the traffickers and to protect the victims of such trafficking, including by protecting their internationally recognized human rights" (preamble). The UK decision was deeply criticised by UN experts, who emphasized the State's obligation to prevent trafficking of those at risk and protect victims without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion or gender:

> *the obligation to investigate credible evidence of child trafficking is essential to ensure accountability for this heinous crime and serious human rights violation […] Implementing these obligations requires action and the courage to listen when judicial bodies make findings indicating a credible suspicion of child trafficking* (OHCHR, 2024)[13].

Had Shamima been classified as a victim of human trafficking, considering her age and the recruitment strategies employed by ISIS to target young women (Perešin, 2018; Turner, 2018), this classification may have altered the legal interpretation of her actions, and potentially influenced the United Kingdom's approach to counter-terrorism efforts[14].

But SIAC quickly dismissed the issue of trafficking and the power of ISIS propaganda in young Western girls, failing also to consider that underage girls' capacity to make conscious choices is a nuanced issue that requires careful consideration of ethical, developmental, and legal factors (Ramakrishna, 2016; Vale, 2019). In the Begum case, the question of her culpability has been framed largely through the lens of individual responsibility, without sufficient consideration of the intersectional factors — particularly age — that might have shaped her decision. While SIAC's decision rests on the assumption of individual autonomy, this perspective

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[13] UN experts have raised these concerns in previous communications (GBR 18/2023, 13/2022, 3/2022) to the United Kingdom and in a submission to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission.

[14] Had SIAC properly considered Shamima's young age, she could have also been classified as a child soldier according to the 2007 Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2007):she was a child below eighteen recruited and used by an armed group, including for sexual exploitation, making her a statutory rape victim (White, 2020). This was not considered: possibly due to child soldiers being consistently gendered with little regard to girl soldiers (Fox, 2004), despite roughly four out of ten child soldiers being girls (United Nations, 2015).

does not fully account for the psychosocial, cultural, and developmental influences that affect minors' ability to make informed choices. Capacity entails the ability to understand and retain information, weigh it, and make decisions (McIlwain, 2011). However, minors' capacity to make such decisions knowingly and intelligently is contentious. Minors' rights and capacities in legal contexts are often limited because of their developmental stage, which may impair their ability to make fully informed decisions (Grisso, 1983). This raises questions about the extent to which Shamima's decision to join a terrorist organisation like ISIS can be considered voluntary and informed, as the argument that she exercised free will in joining ISIS overlooks the structural and psychological influences at play. Studies indicate that radicalisation among minors is rarely a product of purely individual choice; rather, it is shaped by a confluence of political, social and personal factors (Githuthu et al., 2022; Speckhard et al., 2021). Yet, for the British government, Shamima is "in Syria because of her own actions, and is detained in camp run by the Syrian Democratic Forces as a direct consequence of her own actions" (Howard, 2024).

The understanding that Shamima must pay for her choice is also at the centre of SIAC's discussion, where the idea that Shamima consciously chose to join ISIS was reinforced by highlighting that she stayed in Raqqa until the fall of the Caliphate, which, for the Secretary of State, is an indication that she still supports ISIS, and so she represents a danger to UK security. Based on SIAC, because Shamima had the agency to travel to Syria, she must also have had the agency to return sooner to the UK, ignoring the gendered nature of mobility and agency within ISIS (Hong, 2021). In fact, when joining ISIS, women give their passports to ISIS male members as a sign of their dedication, which, along with the necessity for ISIS women to travel with a male guardian, diminishes their chances of escape. In fact, there are few cases of women trying to escape; in 2015, only two Western women returned to their country, compared to 30% of their male counterparts (Cook & Vale, 2018). SIAC's failure to acknowledge these structural gender barriers highlights a broader lack of intersectional awareness in its assessment of Begum's case. By evaluating her actions through a framework that assumes equal agency between male and female recruits, SIAC overlooks the ways in which gendered oppression within ISIS could have constrained her choices. Recognising these intersectional factors is crucial, as it challenges the simplistic narrative of voluntary participation and underscores the need for a more nuanced legal and policy approach that accounts for the specific vulnerabilities faced by women in terrorist organisations.

To strengthen the notion that Shamima still supports ISIS and must pay for her choice, SIAC (2023) highlighted that in the first interview she showed a lack of remorse:

> *On 19th February 2019 there was an interview with a BBC journalist [...] Ms Begum was asked about the Manchester Arena attack, and she described it as "kind of retaliation" for the women and children being killed in Syria and Iraq. Her comment was that this was "fair justification" (SIAC, 2023, para 102).*

However, SIAC failed to consider the context in which the first interview has been conducted: Al-Hawl refugee camp was populated by ISIS supporters, who were present during the interview. Given her criticism of ISIS she was then moved to another camp, Al-Roj, for her own safety. Nevertheless, SIAC interpreted later interviews given in Al-Roj refugee camp, in which she was critical of ISIS, as a simple strategy adopted by Shamima to return to the UK.

Here, the problem seems that Shamima failed to be seen as the "good victim", who would accept responsibility for her actions and express regret, mirroring social perceptions of how a good Muslim girl should behave. Immediately after the interview, *The Sun's* front page stated "NO REGRET": "Arrogant ISIS bride Shamima Begum has a massive ego and shows no remorse for fleeing Britain, body language experts say" (Rogers, 2019). The article describes her as "unconvincing" and "lacking in sincerity and truthfulness" (Rogers, 2019) and the language used evokes the most unfavourable characteristics often attributed to young individuals — specifically, arrogance and dishonesty. Evans & Da Silva (2023) show that vernacular narratives shaping femininity, gender, and their ties to terrorism are based on the belief that female actors express remorse and are judged through lenses of maternalism, religion, and victimhood. They highlight how social media narratives of female terrorists frame gender as binary and fixed, valuing femininity when it is seen as peaceful, maternal, and submissive, thereby reinforcing patriarchal gender structures and hierarchies (Evans & Da Silva, 2023). The media's initial portrayal of Begum as a 'jihadi bride' represents a novel form of gendered and racialised stereotype which does not intend to evoke fear, but rather disgust. It serves to exemplify perceptions of Muslim women as "unassimilated", thereby creating a contemporary societal folk devil (Williamson & Khiabany, 2024).This construction of Begum exhibits significant gendered aspects, contrasting with the fear-based racist depictions frequently applied to Muslim men. Racist constructions of Muslim men are often couched in terms of fear, the making of Begum as a folk devil is a form of gendered "race thinking" (Arendt, 1951; Razack, 2008), which enables treatment of Muslims as a different type of humanity, outside of a political community, who do not deserve the same legal rights as white UK citizens (Williamson & Khiabany, 2024). The application of an intersectional lens to examine Shamima's story has the capacity to challenge othering processes and may elucidate the identification of "at-risk" children and the circumstances contributing to their vulnerability, as it scrutinises the interplay of various significant and overlapping social group affiliations in shaping experiences of vulnerability (Murphy, 2009).

Re-framing autonomy: A relational perspective on Shamima Begum's case

Can Shamima's story be understood from a different analytical perspective? I suggest employing a concept of autonomy that diverges from the traditional liberal view, by interpreting

Shamima's story through the framework of relational autonomy, which is intrinsically linked to the notion of intersectionality.

An important characteristic of feminist perspectives on moral and political theory is the pervasive dissatisfaction with the liberal concept of individual autonomy to which is accorded excessive prominence. This notion presupposes an "atomistic" or "abstract individualistic" notion of the self as fundamentally independent and self-sufficient, implying that the individual can transcend social influences (Barclay, 2000). Yet, this perspective overlooks the inherent interconnectedness of individuals and how their participation in relational networks shapes their desires, aspirations, and, indeed, their very identities (MacIntyre, 2013; Sandel, 1998): in fact,

> *in ordinary life the wish to do one thing rather than another is rooted in dominant conventions, in loyalties and habits one has acquired over time, as well as in the anxieties and pleasures experienced in interaction with lovers and friends, with relatives, teachers, and other authority figures* (Asad, 2006, p. 99).

It is therefore difficult to conceive of any self, autonomous or otherwise, developing without significant causal contributions from others (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

Feminist scholars have challenged "the myth of the unembodied subject" (Kittay et al., 2005, p. 445) that dissociates itself "from the individuality and concrete identity of the other" (Benhabib, 1985, p. 411), proposing the notion of relational autonomy, which conceptualises autonomy not as antithetical to, but rather contingent upon, relationships with others (Hirschmann, 2008). This approach implies a distinct understanding of personhood: "not as isolated and fundamentally separate from others, but as interconnected through relational networks, and via physical, material, psychological, and emotional interdependence" (Hirschmann, 2008, p. 152). Relational perspectives analyse the way in which societal conventions, institutional frameworks, cultural mores, and interpersonal connections shape the beliefs, aspirations, and desires of individuals within an oppressive social context, exploring how such factors contribute to the cultivation of competencies vital for autonomous functioning, including the capacity for self-examination, personal agency, and self-understanding (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). In this view, if the agent is shaped by social factors, it follows that the agent's attributes, including autonomy, are intrinsically social and relational in nature (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

SIAC's decision to treat Shamima's actions as a matter of clear-cut personal choice without fully accounting for the intersectional factors influencing her choices reflects a broader lack of intersectional awareness through the employment of a liberal notion of autonomy. By disregarding the relational and social dimensions that shaped her choice, SIAC misses how power, culture, and identity interlock to shape individuals' decisions. Acknowledging the multiple layers of social and personal factors that shape autonomy could contribute to a more

just and comprehensive understanding of how young people, particularly women, make decisions in specific contexts.

Clearly, the path of Shamima's radicalisation was shaped by several intersectional factors. While much remains unclear, what is known is that she grew up in Bethnal Green, a London neighbourhood inhabited by a deeply conservative Muslim community, where the line between extremism and religion is often blurred (Comeau, 2016). The legal representative of the families is confident that the girls were recruited through a covert network that exists within, and is protected by, the community in East London, and that they were subsequently managed "point to point" (Bennhold, 2015). As she declared in a later interview, "people online were instructing us and, like, coaching us on what to do and what not to do. [I was given] a big list of precise instructions", including what cover story to use if they were discovered (Baker & Joseph Lee, 2023).

Also the departure of Sharmeena had influenced her choice. In a later interview, Shamima stated that

> *Sharmeena was […] talking to us face-to-face about […] coming to ISIS […] I was being manipulated into thinking this was the right thing to do and I was being manipulated with lies about where I would be going and what I would be doing… I mean, in my opinion, even though Sharmeena probably is still radical. I will say she was also a victim of ISIS* (Baker et al., 2023).

Studies suggest that the likelihood of a group of friends being at risk is higher if one of them has travelled to Syria; this is considered a more reliable predictor than factors such as social class or ethnicity (Patel, 2017). However, public officials and the police, while aware of Sharmeena's departure, failed to understand that her closest friends were in danger. As stated by Mr. Akunjee, Begum's lawyer, "from December, it was evident that the girls had made a pact" (Bennhold, 2015).

Shamima and her younger friends were particularly susceptible to ISIS propaganda, which was specifically designed to appeal to younger generations. Many young women, primarily teenagers, were targeted by the terrorist organisation to become child brides for its fighters. The organisation's skilled recruiters took advantage of these young women's sense of "honour" and their naiveté, presenting an idealised vision of life in ISIS-controlled territories as one of domestic bliss among like-minded individuals (Spencer, 2016). Begum herself declared that she left with the promise of paradise, but she found "hell, hell on Earth" (Bunkall, 2021): "at the time I did not know it was a death cult, I thought it was an Islamic community", (*Shamima Begum Apologises to Brits and Says She'd 'rather Die' than Return to IS*, 2021). ISIS recruitment efforts were often carried out through social media, frequently downplaying the violent conditions in which the recruits would live (Al Khazraji, 2023). This propaganda utilised narratives that emphasised empowerment and a sense of belonging, which are particularly effective among this demographic (Khoo & Brown, 2021). Shamima Begum herself asserted that

she "didn't hate Britain, I hated my life really […] I felt very constricted, and I felt I couldn't live the life that I wanted in the UK as a British woman" (Bunkall, 2021). She highlighted that her decision to travel to Syria was influenced by Islamophobia and racism in Britain, as she sought a "pure Islamic life" (Vale, 2019) and a less materialistic and more spiritually fulfilling existence (Jackson, 2024)[15]. This appealed not only to conservative Sunni Muslim women who experienced Islamophobic discrimination and felt that liberal lifestyles were incompatible with their values (Spencer, 2016), but also to women who lived in traditional households where decisions regarding their future were made on their behalf. In Bethnal Green's conservative Muslim community, girls face different challenges from their male counterparts. While Muslim girls such as Shamima, Amira, and Kadiza outperform the boys in schools, their life choices are often limited within their own community: Khadiza's sisters, for instance, had arranged marriages when they were just teenagers (Bennhold, 2015). By providing a religious justification and appearing to empower women to take control of their lives, ISIS encouraged these young women to embark on a journey to join their ranks (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2023). It is certainly possible to contend that ISIS's messaging did not serve to empower women, but rather utilised women to empower ISIS and restrict the freedom of other women. Nevertheless, this viewpoint neglects the potency of gendered messaging and its profound impact on women and girls, persuading them that their religious convictions justified them to disregard societal constraints and defy the wishes of parents, non-ISIS backing spouses, and governments.

Shamina's positioning, her cultural and social environment, and other important factors (age, gender, race etc.) were not considered important by SIAC when discussing her degree of voluntariness (and implicitly, the degree of risk she poses), failing to "recognise the way in which positions of dominance and subordination work in complex and intersecting ways to constitute subjects' experiences of personhood"(Nash, 2008, p. 10).

Who counts as a terrorist? Gender and race in national security decisions

So far, the United Kingdom has repatriated approximately 40% of the 900 individuals who travelled to ISIS, with these individuals assessed as posing no or low risk to the public (Coleman & Cook, 2020). Consequently, it remains unclear why Shamima was rapidly classified as posing a significant threat to UK security, especially considering that the government has access to various measures, including prosecution and Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures

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[15] The phenomenon of Islamophobia in Britain, which has been documented since the Rushdie Affair, underscores the perceived inability of Muslim communities to assimilate, with their ethno-religious characteristics being viewed as obstacles to integration. This perception raises concerns regarding national identity and the so-called "Muslim problem". The detrimental environment is exemplified by events such as the Grenfell Tower disaster and the Windrush scandal, as well as the impact of populism, authoritarianism, and white supremacism on political perspectives concerning diversity and division in the global north. Muslim communities are often perceived as societal threats, ranging from issues of cultural relativism to national security (Abbas, 2020).

(TPIMs), to mitigate the risk posed by returnees such as Begum (Coleman & Cook, 2020). Although the specifics of her evaluation are undisclosed, the risk assessment tools utilised in the UK raise concerns regarding both the interpretation of risk and the reliability of these tools. Her perceived lack of remorse, highlighted in the SIAC proceeding, exemplifies a broader trend of evaluating female terrorists through gendered and racialised lenses. This perspective, influenced by societal norms regarding femininity and the portrayal of Muslim women as threats to social stability, reveals the gender and ethnic biases inherent in the legal and political frameworks that inform national security decisions and shows a lack of intersectional perspective in the analysis of risk (Olofsson et al., 2014).

To begin with, it is important to highlight that in the UK concepts of terrorism and national security are broadly interpreted, with the executive branch of the government holding exclusive authority to determine whether specific actions fall within its broad definition of terrorism. Most countries, including the UK, adopt the UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), which defines foreign fighters as individuals who travel to a foreign country to engage in terrorist activities. This includes carrying out, organising, preparing for, or taking part in terrorist acts, but also working in propaganda, education or travel to marriage (Birdsall, 2024). Clearly, the resolution raises problematic issues: firstly, it calls on states to enact measures against people engaging in terrorist acts without defining terrorism and related activities (Birdsall, 2024). Secondly, not all individuals considered foreign fighters are "fighters" as understood in International Humanitarian Law, i.e., those directly participating in ongoing hostilities (Krähenmann, 2019, p. 241). In the case of Begum, there is no suggestion that she took a direct, active role as an ISIS "fighter", but travelling to a specific area, marrying an ISIL fighter, and "aligning" with the group was deemed sufficient to consider her a foreign fighter. In this context, "alignment" refers to the embracing of ISIS ideology, which may be accompanied by physically joining the relevant organisation (SIAC 2023, p. 27). This is in line with the UK definition of radicalisation as "the process of a person legitimising support for, or use of, terrorist violence" (Prevent Duty Guidance, 2024, p. 21). The definition does not make any difference between support for the use of violence and terrorist violence itself, implying a direct causal relationship between radical ideological, political, or religious beliefs and violent terrorist acts, although such a link is contested (Richards, 2015)[16]. Also, the UK notions of "national security", "conducive to the public good" (Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006), and "seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the United Kingdom" (Immigration Act 2014) are problematic as they lack a clear definition, making them a highly subjective basis for counterterrorism measures (Birdsall, 2024).This subjectivity is central to the case of Begum. The risk she allegedly poses to UK security has never been clearly articulated, which raises questions about how "risk" is interpreted in national security and counterterrorism contexts.

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[16] Hogan (2008) argues that a comprehensive understanding of the causes of terrorism and the strategies to combat it necessitates a clear distinction between (cognitive) "radicalisation" and (behavioural) "mobilisation", "extremism", or "engagement", as well as between "deradicalisation" and "disengagement".

Scholarly literature shows that the understanding of risk is influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and other social divisions. Abu-Bakare (2020), for instance, highlights how race plays a fundamental role in shaping national security policies, particularly in counterterrorism where "terrorism" is frequently associated with Muslims, leading to the racialisation of "Muslimness" as inherently violent and threatening (Kundnani, 2015). This racial framing influences not only who is seen as a security threat but also how governments respond to different forms of violence (Meier, 2022). Mirza and Meetoo's study (2018) reveals that the UK Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) discourse promotes a particular ideal of Muslim femininity in order to maintain the social order and to make young women more controllable (Jackson, 2024). The PVE interprets the "signs" of radicalisation through a gendered lens, basing suspicion and risk assessment on prevailing notions of appropriate behaviour for Muslim girls (Jackson, 2024). This is exemplified in the emphasis on conformity and normality which shows how indicators of radicalisation are evaluated against the stereotype of the "good Muslim girl". Young women who embody a neoliberal identity, excelling academically and sharing mainstream popular culture preferences, are not perceived as radicalised because they are viewed as "normal", mirroring the hegemonic femininity of an "unspoken but normalised white British identity" (Ali, 2020, p. 587). In the Begum case, despite studies suggesting that the likelihood of a group of friends being at risk is higher if one of them has travelled to Syria (Patel, 2017), when law enforcement interviewed the three girls at their school, officials concluded that there were no signs of radicalisation. This misjudgement suggests that the police were operating with preconceived notions of the behaviour of radicalised Muslim girls. Despite, presumably, searching for indications of radicalisation, the authorities were unable to detect any at the time, as the girls successfully portrayed themselves as "good Muslim girls" (Jackson, 2024).

The Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) and the Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG) tools employed to assess risk in the UK (Augestad Knudsen, 2020) are also contentious. Firstly, they conceptualise radicalisation not merely as a risk, but as a measurable and quantifiable risk. While the incorporation of uncertainty is increasingly emphasised by scholars and practitioners, these tools do not promote the recording of genuine uncertainty (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). Secondly, the indicators on which they are based suggest radicalisation should be understood as a condition confined to the present — a state rather than a process — while simultaneously representing a situation of becoming (Augestad Knudsen, 2020)[17]. The only form of context that the indicators explicitly consider are the immediate, private, and situational aspects of the

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[17] The risk indicators are divided into three categories. "Engagement: 1) need to redress injustice and express grievance; 2) need to defend against threat, 3) need for identity, meaning, belonging, 4) need for excitement, comradeship or adventure, 6) need for dominance, 7) susceptibility to indoctrination, 8) political/moral motivation, 9) opportunistic involvement, 10) family or friends support extremist offending, 11) transitional periods, 12) group influence and control, 13) mental health. Intent: 1) over-identification with a group or cause, 2) us and them thinking, 3) dehumanisation of the enemy, 4) attitudes that justify offending, 5) harmful mans to an end, 6) harmful end objectives. Capability: 1) individual knowledge, skills and competencies, 2) access to networks, funding and equipment, 3) criminal history,+ any other factor" (in Lloyd & Dean, 2015, p. 46).

assessed individual's family and personal network (Herzog-Evans, 2018). Thirdly, the indicators are oriented towards mapping an individual's ways of thinking, reasoning, and perceiving, with less emphasis placed on the content of this thinking or the context in which it occurs (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). Implicitly, this suggests that social, political, and economic phenomena can and should be explained in terms of individuals and their psychology. "Strong" methodological individualism considers interpersonal relations as secondary and regards political and social structures as of even less importance (Heath-Kelly, 2020). In situations of military conflict, for instance, individuals might be expected to adopt some level of "us and them thinking", or even "dehumanisation of the enemy". When assessing individuals with recent experiences of war, recording this as part of an individual's context could provide perspective on the findings and be relevant for determining their consequences (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). While awareness of context is encouraged, neither the ERG nor the VAF indicators mandate assessors to systematically and critically consider broader political or societal contexts (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). This does not imply that assessments are devoid of context. Instead, the tools' foundation in "strong" methodological individualism seems to have resulted in an implicit over-reliance on individual assessors (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). In other words, by not requiring the systematic and transparent inclusion of pertinent political and societal *contexts*, the ERG and VAF indicators permit each assessor's personal understanding of context to serve as the normative basis for assessments. This situation not only exacerbates the power imbalance between assessors and those being assessed but also underscores the necessity for assessors to be adequately experienced and trained (Augestad Knudsen, 2020). Alarmingly, however, the ERG and the VAF tools are currently employed by professional groups lacking specialised psychological risk assessment expertise, such as local authority bureaucrats and police officers (Augestad Knudsen, 2020)[18].

While scholars have examined the relationships between risk and gender (Hannah-Moffat & O'Malley, 2007), risk and class (Cebulla, 2018), risk and age (Wall, 2014), and risk and race (Finucane et al., 2013), a comprehensive analytical framework that recognises the interconnectedness of these dimensions and their impact on the representation, production, and reproduction of risk in society remains an unfulfilled objective (Olofsson et al., 2014). Theories of risk and intersectionality have developed independently, leaving the multidimensional effects of individuals' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1990) and the complex ways in which risk-based policies and institutional networks perpetuate inequality underexplored in risk theorisation (Olofsson et al., 2014). Integrating intersectionality theory into the study of risk and inequality is crucial, as it can significantly advance risk research by effectively incorporating social categories such as gender, age, and race into the empirical analysis of "risk" (Olofsson et al., 2014). The understanding of identities as products of multiple

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[18] Harris et al. (2015) found that 30% of the variability in PCL-R ratings is due to assessor differences with some assessors providing consistently different evaluations despite similar experience and qualifications.

axes of difference can add detail to research on social risk phenomena (Henne & Troshynski, 2013). Hannah-Moffat (Hannah-Moffat & O'Malley, 2007), for instance, employs intersectionality to examine the relationship between inequality, risk, and crime control, illustrating how inequalities are embedded within positivist risk frameworks (Henne & Troshynski, 2013). Her research reveals that incorporating intersectional analyses of risk facilitates a more precise articulation of how risk logics can create a disjuncture between individuals and their experiences, revealing how the evolving configuration of risk leads to more extensive race/gender-structured power relations (Hannah-Moffat & Maurutto, 2010).

Conclusion

For SIAC, whether or not Shamima Begum went to Syria voluntarily is a complex issue that falls within the domain of the intelligence agencies advising the Secretary of State, as they are (supposedly) uniquely positioned to evaluate the multifaceted factors that influenced her decision, given their access to comprehensive intelligence and understanding of radicalisation processes. However, it is difficult to determine how security experts assessed her: the rapid decision-making process in her absence, the difficulties in applying a fixed and monolithic Western/liberal notion of autonomy, particularly in a case involving minors, and the many critiques to risk assessment in the UK raise questions about the admissibility of the case itself.

In the opinion of SIAC and the Secretary of State, Begum's decision to join ISIS represents her own personal agency, and she must be held responsible for her own choice. Begum's inability to make sound decisions was attributed solely to her through a neoliberal discourse of responsibility, wherein all other factors of the case — such as her age, police failures, and the potential for online "grooming" — were disregarded. Her culpability was isolated in the singular "decision" she made to travel to Syria. In other words, by asserting that actions have consequences, the various steps leading to that decision were obscured, rendering Begum entirely accountable for her actions (Jackson, 2024). Although SIAC perceives Begum as an autonomous decision-maker acting rationally and without constraints, a substantial body of literature underscores the significance of social context, psychological factors, and political extremism (Bloom, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Taylor & Horgan, 2012).

To comprehensively address the critical challenges facing young people, it is imperative to employ an intersectional approach and methodological framework that not only considers diversity in terms of culture, race, and ethnicity but also incorporates other significant and intersecting social group affiliations such as gender, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, immigrant status etc. (Ghavami et al., 2016), to understand how multiple social group memberships interact to shape experiences of vulnerability and resilience in specific contexts. What is lacking when examining the Begum case is an analysis of the intricate

interplay of socio-political structures, including Islamophobia, gender-based violence, and geopolitical ruptures. A more critical analysis of those factors would not only make sense of Shamima's story, but it would also

> *allow for complex mappings of how agency and vulnerability act in concert, revealing the deep human knots that shape any such situation. A complexity that might for once disrupt the tired Orientalist binary of villain/victim that remains the insistent schema through which Muslim women must always be read* (Kapoor, 2019).

Recognising this is crucial, and adopting an intersectional approach that challenges the traditional notions of culpability within the justice system moves beyond rigid autonomy-based frameworks, highlighting the need for prevention and intervention strategies that consider youth vulnerabilities and the manipulative tactics of terrorist organisations (Biswas & Deylami, 2019; Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2023).

An intersectional approach should also be employed in the analysis of risk Begum poses. SIAC's perspective that "any individual assessed to have travelled to Syria and to have aligned with ISIL poses a threat to national security" (SIAC, 2023, para 128), which is shaped by societal norms regarding femininity and the depiction of Muslim women as potential disruptors of social harmony, highlights the gender and ethnic biases embedded within the legal and political frameworks that influence national security policies, showing a lack of intersectional analysis in the context of risk assessment (Olofsson et al., 2014). By branding Begum as a risk to national security and subsequently revoking her citizenship, the white secular State reveals its view of female Muslim agency as a threat to its conception of the ideal woman. This shows the emergence of securitising and civilising narratives, where the State's talk of Begum as a "security threat" may not be about a threat to security, but a threat to the State's own conception of what constitutes an agency-driven "British" woman (Razack, 2022, p. 103). Shamima's dehumanisation does not directly lead to specific policy decisions; instead, discourses that dehumanise subjects can influence the scope of options deemed acceptable, and can construct the classifications of "vulnerable" or "at-risk" individuals via the process of othering (Brown et al., 2017), thereby restricting the available choices and making certain policies more viable (Jackson, 2021). When these narratives go unchallenged by intersectional and rigorous analysis, not only does it limit more innovative approaches to conflict resolution (Wibben, 2010), but it also obscures the structural roots of the problem of radicalisation, limiting the capacity of Western countries to prevent extremism and to ensure fair trials and respect for fundamental human rights (UN Security Council-Counter Terrorism Committee, 2019). When these narratives go unchallenged by intersectional and rigorous analysis, not only does it limit more constructive approaches to conflict (Wibben, 2010), but it also conceals the structural conditions underpinning radicalisation — thereby weakening both the effectiveness

of counter-extremism efforts and the protection of fundamental rights, including the right to a fair trial (UN Security Council-Counter Terrorism Committee, 2019).

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