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Tolerated citizenship and FGM-safeguarding: experiences of unbelonging for those of Somali-heritage living in Bristol, UK

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ABSTRACT

The UN has stated its aim to eliminate 'Female Genital Mutilation' by 2030. In adherence to this, many countries have introduced or enhanced legislative and policy measures aimed at prevention through surveillance and punishment. In the European context, while protecting young girls from harm is the notional purpose of such measures, political and media debates have often been framed within nation-building rhetoric: across Europe 'FGM' has become the de rigour signifier of the vilified migrant/Muslim Other. This paper explores the impact of FGM-safeguarding measures in relation to citizenship and belonging for people of Somali heritage living in Bristol, England. It contributes to the incipient critical scholarship concerned with the powerful but blinkered hegemonic narrative pedalled by the UN and the policy turn within Europe towards prevention-through-criminalisation. Further, it advances debates on the conundrum of inclusive citizenship considering how a policy intervention which was initiated with widespread support among affected groups and undertaken on an anti-racist platform, resulted in stigmatisation and racism. Using Anderson's (*Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. Oxford: OUP) framework of citizenship as a 'community of value', the paper also contributes to the growing body of work on how citizenship is experienced and the symbiotic and interdependent relationship between status, rights and identity.

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The UN has stated its aim to eliminate 'Female Genital Mutilation' ('FGM')¹ by 2030. In adherence to this, many countries have introduced or enhanced legislative and policy measures aimed at prevention through surveillance and punishment (Kandala and Komba 2018). In the European context, while protecting young girls from harm is the notional purpose of such measures, political and media debates have often been

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framed within nation-building rhetoric: across Europe 'FGM' has become the de rigour signifier of the vilified migrant/Muslim Other (Johnsdotter and Mestre 2017).

This paper explores the impact of FGM-safeguarding measures in relation to citizenship and belonging for people of Somali heritage living in the city of Bristol, England. It contributes to the incipient critical scholarship concerned with the powerful but blinkered hegemonic narrative pedalled by the United Nations and World Health Organisation and the policy turn within Europe towards prevention-through-criminalisation. Further, it advances debates on the conundrum of inclusive citizenship (Cohen 2009; Ellermann 2020) considering how a policy intervention which was initiated with widespread support among affected groups and undertaken on an anti-racist platform, resulted in stigmatisation and racism. Using Anderson's (2013) framework of citizenship as a 'community of value', the paper also contributes to the growing body of work on how citizenship is experienced (Birkvad 2019) and the symbiotic and interdependent relationship between Joppke's (2010) three aspects of citizenship: status, rights and identity.

Scholarship provides detailed discussion of the role of citizenship laws in delineating national identity and fostering individual attachment to the nation (Kymlicka 1995; Yuval-Davis 2006). There is widespread agreement that in the last few decades many states have shifted from ethnicity-based systems of citizenship towards more civic and nominally more liberal conceptualisations even though such changes are not reflected in political rhetoric (Joppke 2010). However, prominent thinkers have argued that while such regimes may give the appearance of being fairer, more open and more inclusive, they are actually similarly restrictive and discriminatory, with talk about culture, language and values replacing ethnicity, race and class (De Genova 2018; Kundnani 2007). Anderson (2013) posits that value-based citizenship models are built on the conceptualisation of the nation-state as a 'community of value' populated by ideal-type 'good citizens' who must be protected from the unvalued and the value-less: non-citizens and 'failed citizens'. A fourth – obscured – category of people occupy a liminal space between the 'good citizens' and the non- or 'failed citizens'. These are the '(not-quite-)good-enough citizens' or 'tolerated citizens' (Anderson 2013, 6). They are those whose status, skin colour, class and/or religion results in only contingent acceptance into 'the community of value'. Frequently misrecognised as non-citizens or 'failed citizens', they must 'endlessly prove themselves, marking the borders' through demonstrating they hold 'the right values'.

The majority of scholarship on the role of law and policy in shaping (un)belonging emanates either from a focus on nationality and immigration legislation (e.g. Bonjour and de Hart 2021; Ellermann 2020; Fortier 2021; Kapoor and Narkowitz 2019) or from a focus on racialised crime prevention policies such as 'Stop and Search' (e.g. Murray et al. 2021) or anti-terrorism (e.g. Abbas 2021; Pantazis and Pemberton 2009). The legislation and policies examined in both these sets of scholarships are deliberately discriminatory and hostile, whereas safeguarding is typically defined in positive terms, as 'action [...] taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm' (NSPCC 2022). This paper offers a unique perspective on the intersection of these two scholarships through its focus on legislation and policies implemented with the purpose of *including* black and brown bodies in the nation-state and protecting them as *British Citizens*. Despite this claim, participants described being subject to processes of unbelonging by state agents, in which they perceived that their rights as citizens

were rescinded and their legitimacy to membership of the nation was abrogated. They discovered that despite living up to the idealised notion of the ‘Good Citizen’ and upholding and embracing so-called ‘British values’, they were treated as ‘Failed Citizens’ and/or Bad Migrants (Anderson 2013). This led them to question the genuineness of political discourse on integration and inclusive citizenship. FGM-safeguarding measures brought to the fore for our participants what Cohen (2009) terms the ‘myth of full citizenship’.

The paper begins with a deeper discussion of the relevant and recent developments in academia and UK government policy in relation to citizenship and belonging. It then outlines FGM-safeguarding policy and the context of its development in the UK, with a focus on the measures enacted by the Serious Crimes Act 2015. After describing the methodology, we analyse the data from the focus groups first in relation to claims and performances of ‘Good’ citizenship and then in relation to ‘Failed’ citizenship, concluding with a discussion of the ontological insecurity of ‘tolerated’ citizenship.

Citizenship and belonging

In the UK, notions of citizenship underwent ‘a quiet revolution’ (Pearce in Somerville 2007, 56) in the first decades of this century. The summer of 2001 saw a series of riots and tensions, but rather than look at structural inequalities, the government placed the blame on a lack of ‘integration’ among populations understood as Muslim and migrant (Kundnani 2007). Following the 9/11 attacks which occurred at the end of that same summer, this discourse took on a new urgency. The political response was to re-articulate integration as ‘the duty’ of migrants (Blair 2006), and to reformulate citizenship as the embracing of ‘British values’, defined by English-language ability, being of ‘good character’ and conforming to an idealised notion of the autonomous subject of social contract theory (Morrice 2017). Much of this discourse was aimed specifically at Muslims (Karlsen and Nazroo 2013; Kundnani 2007).

This ‘quiet revolution’ included a politically-led re-imagining of the body politic as ‘a *community of value*, composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture, or language – that is, its members have shared values’ (Anderson 2013, 2). It became less quiet under successive Conservative governments, with the discourse on integration as *the responsibility of migrants* and citizenship as an embodiment of *shared values*, pervading the political rhetoric of David Cameron (PM 2010–2016), Theresa May (PM 2016–2019) and Boris Johnson (PM 2019–ongoing).² Rhetoric was reinforced by policy. Punitive measures included deportation and citizenship deprivation in the case of proven or merely suspected ‘bad character’, itself used as a proxy for a failure to display the values of the ‘Good’ – ergo British – ‘Citizen’ (Yeo 2020). The use of deportation has increased exponentially, and citizenship deprivation has gone from being a seldom-used technical possibility, to a widespread tool of governance and discipline, including for many who have spent their lives in the UK (De Noronha 2020; Yeo 2020). Meanwhile markers of ‘British values’ were added to pre-entry requirements, so that selection and value-shaping now begins prior to entry and continues throughout extended qualifying periods (Yeo 2020).

In this re-imagining, the Migrant is positioned akin to the colonised native, as in need of varying degrees of *civilising* depending on provenance, a process which can be termed *citizenisation* (drawing on both Larin (2020) and Fortier (2021)). In the UK citizenisation takes a minimum of six years. The final hurdle is *naturalisation*, the process by which legal citizenship, and thus formal, symbolic belonging, is acquired. Naturalisation is discretionary (British Nationality Act 1981, s.6(1)); framed as a recognition or award bestowed upon only those deemed deserving. Since 2004, success in naturalising has culminated in a mandatory oath-taking ceremony of social closure in which new citizens are both lauded for their achievements in displaying ‘Britishness’ thus far and exhorted to live up to the standards of the idealised ‘Good Citizen’ in the future (Badenhoop 2017, 2021).

But while the process of naturalisation shapes subject-formation (Badenhoop, 2021; Damsholt 2018), the promise of citizenisation is specious, comparable to the civilising mission of colonialism with its (false) promise of meaningful and equal participation provided that the values and behaviour of the most superior class of White gentlemen were adequately displayed and performed (Fanon 2008). As Anderson (2015, 196) argues, political discourse creates a ‘fantasy citizenship of real inclusion, that promises, once you have permanent residence or citizenship, everything will be alright’. The reality is, however, that those who have naturalised as citizens are never fully accepted into the ‘community of value’ but hold an indeterminate and contingent position as ‘tolerated citizens’ (Anderson 2013, 6). They are easily – often deliberately – misrecognised as non-citizens or ‘Failed Citizens’ and therefore ‘must endlessly prove themselves, marking the borders, particularly of course by decrying each other to prove that they have the right values’ (Anderson 2013, 6).

The most prominent and obvious type of (mis)recognition stems from racism (Xie et al. 2021). Racialised (whether due to skin colour, religion, or accent) British citizens are routinely presumed to be migrants whether from the first or fifth generation. This construction is evident in everyday societal racism, in the institutional racism documented in state services, but also at the structural level, embedded within legislation and state policies as demonstrated by the Windrush scandal (Bhattacharyya et al. 2021; Fortier 2021). Recent work in migration studies has used the concept of ontological in/security (as derived from R.D. Laing and developed by Giddens (1991)) to analyse the consequences of state and non-state racism on refugee-citizens’ sense of belonging. Based on empirical research with minority youth in Scotland, Botterill, Hopkins, and Sanghera (2020, 1139) found that achieving ontological security relies in large part on ‘the recognition and validation of others’ and that racism and Islamophobia work against this process. In their study of Burundian refugee-citizens in Tanzania meanwhile, Daley, Kamata, and Singo (2018) demonstrate that formal, legal recognition (i.e. naturalisation) is only one aspect to achieving ontological security for refugees albeit an important one. In addition, however, racialised citizens have historically been constructed as ‘Failed Citizens’ through processes of criminalisation (Hall et al. 1978; Shankley and Williams 2020). One obvious manifestation of this is the police procedure of ‘Stop and Search’ which disproportionately targets Black people, damaging trust in police and Black people’s sense of belonging to the wider imagined community (Murray et al. 2021). Also of relevance is the policing response to ‘Islamic’ terrorism over the last two decades (Pantazis and Pember-ton 2009) and the corresponding construction of Muslim family life as incompatible with

so-called ‘British values’ (e.g. Casey 2016). In 2008, Dustin and Phillips identified four topics routinely cited in the media to exemplify this difference: forced marriage, honour killing, ‘FGM’ and veiling. Some 14 years on, three of those topics have faded from prominence in political and media discourse whilst one – ‘FGM’ – has become the de rigueur signifier of ‘barbarity’ and ‘backward’ culture³ and thus stands as a proxy for irreconcilable difference with the *civilised* West (Dustin 2010; Rashid 2016).

We argue that despite the discourse of inclusive citizenship and anti-racism that were the driving force behind recent anti-‘FGM’ measures, a colonial logic pervades in which, in contrast to the (white, British) ‘Good Citizen’ for whom culture is extrinsic; for racialised and naturalised citizens, culture is deemed to be constitutive and inescapable (Anderson 2013). We demonstrate that participants were perceived to be persisting in the practice of ‘FGM’ solely on account of their ethnic heritage and even in the absence of actual evidence (Karlsen et al. 2022). This insensitive approach to safeguarding resulted in widespread alienation among those affected and made a mockery of government and local authority claims of inclusive citizenship and *safeguarding* itself.

FGM-safeguarding in the UK

FC/FGM became the subject of explicit criminalisation in the UK with the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985. This was repealed and replaced by the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, which, as well as changing the terminology, broadened the legal scope to give extra-territorial effect. In the debates in the Houses of Parliament leading up to both pieces of legislation, parliamentarians were explicit that FC/FGM was already criminal and prosecutable; both acts were primarily symbolic exercises with a view to value-shaping and nation-building in the context of increased migration from Africa. Perhaps because of this, it was not surprising that prosecutions did not follow, but as time passed, the lack of prosecutions was increasingly perceived to stem from racism or, as one MP put it more euphemistically, ‘what I can best describe as a peculiarly British fear of offending people’s cultural sensibilities’ (Hansard, 10/03/2014).

A high-profile campaign in 2014 spearheaded by a young ethnic Somali Bristolian, Fahma Mohamed, brought the issue to the attention of the national media and resulted in further legislative and policy measures being taken. ‘FGM’ was included (alongside cyber-bullying, child sexual exploitation, mental health and radicalisation) in the government’s safeguarding guidance ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’ and the (then) Education Secretary, Michael Gove, wrote to every school in the country to alert them to ‘FGM’ as a safeguarding issue (Topping 2014). In these debates the Britishness of the victims was repeatedly emphasised, a tactic which took on the mantle of anti-racism in so far as it articulated particular (young, female) Black and Brown bodies to be one of ‘us’, but simultaneously re-articulated the centrality of racialised notions of ‘culture’ and ‘values’ in the construction of citizenship (Sharma 2020). Similarly, in the government-ordered report on integration (Casey 2016), the practice of ‘FGM’ is held up as the epitome of the ‘regressive practices’ of (Muslim) cultural Others. This discourse was reflected in state funding so that organisations that raised awareness of ‘FGM’ and campaigned against it were funded under the government’s integration strategy on the basis of ‘championing what unites our country across class, colour and creed, and [...]

standing up for and supporting British values’ (Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, HCWS154 2014). ‘FGM’ has been and continues to be presented as the antithesis of ‘British values’ and the exemplar of barbarity, employed countless times by politicians as a discursive tool of Othering.

Based on an assumption that the relevant authorities were prejudiced and/or fearful of being considered racist, the Serious Crimes Act 2015 introduced mandatory reporting and the policies which accompanied the Act co-opted health practitioners, teachers, and social workers to *police* the behaviour of families from countries with a high prevalence of FC/FGM. Schools were urged to take action – i.e. notify social services – if it came to their attention that a family from an affected community was going on holiday (Karlsen et al. 2019). In turn, social services and police were tasked with taking preventative action by visiting families, advising them of the law, and questioning their holiday plans.

Bristol was a particular focus for FGM-safeguarding due to its prominence in community-led anti-FC/FGM campaigning. A unique partnership formed between the local authority and activists from affected communities which led to the development of an initiative which became known as *The Bristol Model*, premised on community involvement alongside more conventional multi-agency teamwork (FORWARD 2017). It was intended to tackle the issue with meaningful inclusion of the affected communities; in a context – with reference to Spivak (1998) – where the subaltern was not only able to speak but was heard by those in positions of power. The apparent success of *The Bristol Model* led to it being showcased as the desirable model by which local authorities should implement the national measures (FORWARD 2017; Lewicki and O’Toole 2017). Despite this, stories of the inherent stigmatisation and systemic racism associated with FGM-safeguarding began to emerge from cities across the UK including Bristol (Aviram 2018; MEND, 2019; Mohamed 2017; Mohamed 2018). This research provides evidence with regard to how people of Somali heritage living in Bristol – some of whom were activists and had been involved in the formation of the Bristol Model – experienced FGM-safeguarding.

Methodology

The purpose of our research was to document and analyse experiences of FGM-safeguarding (Karlsen et al. 2019). Given the prominence of local community and campaign groups from Bristol in the development of the policies and legislation, the city was an obvious choice for research on its impact. Further, events in early 2018 (the well-publicised prosecution of a Bristol-Somali father for ‘FGM’ and the airing of a Channel 4 documentary entitled ‘The FGM Detectives’ which followed Avon & Somerset Constabulary over the course of their investigation) triggered an overflow of anger within the Bristol Somali population, leading to a direct request to the University of Bristol for research into the impact of FGM-safeguarding policy and legislation. The authors responded to this request and, having gained ethical approval from the University of Bristol, we conducted six focus groups with men (n.9) and women (n.21) in the summer of 2018. The participants in three focus groups (FG1 and FG2 – mothers, and FG3 – fathers) were recruited through snowballing from those initial contacts. Based on the assumption that these participants were self-selecting to participate on the basis of negative experiences of FGM-

safeguarding and thus to ensure robustness and rigour, a further three groups (FG4 – mothers, FG5 – fathers, and FG6 – young people) were recruited through Bristol-Somali anti-FC/FGM activists, some of whom had been involved in the creation and implementation of the Bristol Model, personal contacts and snowballing. FC/FGM is, of course, not limited to the Somali population, and indeed this problematic focus was a key complaint about the implementation of FGM-safeguarding from participants (analysed below). The research team consulted with local community representatives with regard to how best to elicit the data and what support would be needed to enable participation. This resulted in gender-specific focus groups (a key recommendation), four of which were held in community venues in participants' neighbourhoods and two at the university. These were conducted in English with translation support as required, creche facilities and refreshments. The discussions were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to identify dominant themes; through this process citizenship/sense of belonging emerged as one of the most prominent. The participants were invited to a presentation of the analysis-in-progress to ensure resonance and validity. The feedback at this event resoundingly confirmed the themes generated from the analysis. The final report (Karlsen et al. 2019) was presented to stakeholders, participants and other locals and an overview of the key findings was made available in English and Somali. We refer below to participants as 'mothers', 'fathers' and 'young people' in order to emphasise that they were recounting their experiences of safeguarding from these role-based perspectives.

The 'good citizen' discourse

Participants experienced FGM-safeguarding as a challenge to, or dismissal of, their claim of belonging to the nation. In the first instance, they saw this as a moment of misrecognition when they felt that state officials wrongly categorised them as 'migrants' rather than 'citizens'. The focus groups provided participants with the opportunity to counteract this rejection, which most did, with reference to the 'good citizen' values as delineated in the naturalisation process. Many then went on to question the premise of the value-based citizenship model. The encounters triggered a re-evaluation of their sense of belonging. For some, safeguarding encounters gave rise to the realisation that however well they performed 'good citizenship' they would always be treated as 'migrants' and thus the promise of inclusion was a myth. Through these encounters, participants came to the realisation that as racialised citizens they were, and would only ever be, at best 'tolerated'.

The political construction of 'Britishness' as a set of values was clearly articulated in the focus groups. We did not ask direct questions about citizenship status as this was not the aim of the research, but participants framed their experiences of FGM-safeguarding in response to and within this political discourse. Indeed, one of the major complaints articulated across the focus groups – and in direct opposition to the claim made by MPs in the debates on the 2015 Act that FGM-safeguarding was driven by the need to include black and brown citizens – was that FGM-safeguarding policy resulted in them not being treated as *British Citizens*. In constructing this argument, they referenced and relied on the values of citizenship specified in the naturalisation requirements, providing support for Badenhoop's (2017) argument that naturalisation is a process of subject-formation. Participants emphasised that they had fulfilled their part of the bargain as individuals and as a community; they embodied the idealised 'Good Citizen':

The Somali community are law-abiding. (Father, FG3)

I've read all the rules and regulations. (Mother, FG2)

I pay tax, I have [a taxi] licence, etc. (Father, FG3)

I've never done anything wrong to my kids. Our kids go to school, their attendance is good. (Mother, FG1)

We all want our kids to be like any other normal kid in the UK. Do well at school, be happy and healthy. (Mother, FG2)

I speak good English. (Mother, FG4)

I grew up in this country. I came when I was 10 years old. I've never been back. (Mother, FG1)

These comments, we suggest, should be seen as claims to, and performances of, citizenship rights (Isin 2017; Odasso 2021). All naturalising citizens must pass two tests: one to demonstrate English-language proficiency and the other to demonstrate knowledge of 'Life in the UK'. The official guidance (Guide to Living in the UK, 2014) expands on the political rhetoric discussed above in which integration – and thus gaining the values which make one eligible to become a citizen – is constructed as the responsibility of the individual. According to the guidance the overarching responsibility is to obey the law, but this responsibility is broken down into three complementary sets of values: 'responsibilities at work, [...] in everyday life [and] to your family' (2014, 22). These values – or virtues – are extolled again at citizenship ceremonies (Badenhoop 2017). Thus for naturalising citizens, the notion that the (valued) 'Good Citizen' is defined in relation to his productive participation in the waged economy, to the expectation that s/he will not merely refrain from criminal activity, but will also conform to and uphold everyday 'rules and regulations' such as ensuring children's attendance at school and producing 'happy and healthy' children, is far from abstract or academic, but ingrained in the process of citizenisation.⁴ In this, then, participants not only provided ample material to support Anderson's (2013, 6) theory that tolerated citizens 'must endlessly prove [...] they have the right values', but also that the values enshrined in the naturalisation process have had significant impact on this refugee community in relation to their subject-formation as British Citizens (cf. Badenhoop 2017; Damsholt 2018).

Although the focus groups provided opportunity for participants to (re)assert their fulfilment of the values upheld in citizenship discourse and thereby correct the apparent misrecognition, a deeper sense of unease and disquiet prevailed. For many the contingency of belonging had been made apparent through the way that state officials conducted safeguarding differentially according to profession and English-language ability. On one level, then, participants upheld and re-articulated the 'good citizen' discourse, but they also complicated and challenged it.

Being a productive worker is a fundamental aspect in the construction of citizenship as a set of values (Anderson 2013; 2015). Political and media discourse frequently epitomises migration in these terms; desirable migrants (and those deserving of future citizenship) are either 'the brightest and the best' (e.g. Patel 2020) or 'hard-working families' (e.g. Cameron 2013) while undesirable migrants are refugees – constructed as parasites and leeches (Musolff 2015) – or benefit cheats/scroungers (Anderson

2013). In FGM-safeguarding encounters, participants with professional jobs initially experienced discrimination on account of being (mis)recognised as undesirable migrants, quickly followed by acceptance and acknowledgement as an equal on account of being professional.

[The social worker] said, ‘What do you do?’ I said, ‘I’m a staff nurse.’ And the behaviour and their expression, it changed. They started to have a conversation like I was human. (Mother, FG1)

[As soon as they knew what job my husband did], suddenly they didn’t need to come to our house, the police didn’t need to be involved. (Mother, FG2)

The mother in the first quote was on maternity leave and described an initially very hostile encounter with social services and police who visited her at her home without forewarning. In the second quote, the mother here told us of being called more than once by social services demanding to visit her at home (she had been out when they had attempted a visit). Both participants described an immediate change of tone and subsequent change of degree of intervention on discovery by state officials of their ‘professional’ status. For these participants, their sudden elevation from ‘migrant’ to ‘citizen’ exposed not only the contingency of their own belonging, but also a disquieting sense of their own inadvertent participation in the devaluing of non-professionals. As ‘mothers’ they were treated as undeserving migrants who brought no contributory value to the UK and, therefore, were assumed not to hold ‘British’ values and thus be in need of the most rigorous forms of FGM-safeguarding. As ‘professionals’ they were treated as deserving citizens who brought value to the UK and, therefore, were assumed to hold ‘British’ values and thus not be in need of extensive forms of FGM-safeguarding.

This discomfort was also felt with regard to English-language ability. Proficiency in English has been politically and legally constructed as a key marker of belonging, and unsurprisingly therefore, this was brought up repeatedly. Many participants regurgitated government discourse on high-level English-language ability as a marker of the ‘Good Citizen’. For example, one mother stated that, as a consequence of her desire to ensure her children’s full integration, i.e. to live up to the ideal of the ‘good citizen’, she had insisted on English being the only language spoken at home. Another participant stated that English proficiency enabled you to reassure people that you did truly belong and were a ‘Good Citizen’ – ‘If you don’t speak the language, then you come across as suspicious’ (Mother, FG2). Those who failed to learn English to a sufficient level were thought to be placing themselves at the mercy of state officials: ‘It’s harder for someone [a state official] who doesn’t speak the same language to relate to that person’ (Father, FG5). In many ways then, participants reproduced the political discourse of learning English as a primary ‘duty’ of migrant-citizens.

Nevertheless, there was a great deal of sympathy for those who did not speak English well – and there were several participants whose limited English-language ability resulted in them speaking in Somali and asking others to translate. Participants felt that state officials involved in FGM-safeguarding deliberately avoided engaging interpreters for home visits to take advantage of people’s poor language ability and ‘intimidate’ them (Mother, FG2). Others felt that police and social workers intentionally used complicated

terms or long words. Many told us that the forms they were expected to sign were written in English and no translation was provided. They spoke of state officials demanding that they sign then and there and giving people no opportunity to

read at their own pace, or get help, and understand what is on this documentation. It's just; they come and visit the family, they bring a pile of documents and then they go through it and they ask them to sign on the spot. (Father, FG5)

Participants thus complicated the political discourse embedded in the naturalisation process with the counternarrative that communication was a responsibility for both citizen *and* the state. Certainly the migrant-citizen had a responsibility to learn: those that did speak English spoke of it as a marker of their commitment to integrate and they spoke with sorrow of those that had not managed to learn sufficient English. But participants also recognised the responsibility of the state to ensure that communication was achieved. To this end, they were aware of the inherent power wielded by state agents simply by way of their native command of English and that this power was easily abused by being utilised as a means of othering and therefore projecting unbelonging. This could be achieved by not bringing interpreters, by demanding that papers [written in English] were signed then and there, and by state officials deliberately or insensitively using unnecessarily complicated language or jargon.

However, it was also reported to us that even when participants *did* speak fluent English, state officials sometimes ignored this fact. In the context of FGM-safeguarding encounters, state officials treated them first and foremost – regardless of legal status and regardless of English-language fluency – as foreign non-citizens. This behaviour was experienced as deliberate racism:

I speak good English and they felt they could belittle me and undermine me further by saying, [in patronizing tone] 'Do you understand what we're saying?' You know very, very bad practice, humiliating and micro-aggression of racism and discrimination they were presenting and that left me really, really upset. (Mother, FG4)

Forkert et al. (2020, 12) have argued that 'being a "model immigrant" is no protection against' racialisation as a migrant. FGM-safeguarding was a moment of realisation for many participants that the promise of full inclusion was a lie or myth (Cohen 2009). Their ethnicity, skin-colour, religion and former migrant-status all precluded them from full acceptance.

Definitely my identity was questioned and I didn't feel like a British Citizen. [...] It was a lesson well learned. I've got a British passport, but I'm not ... You are treated differently. I felt like I didn't belong here. All this time I've wasted thinking I fitted in. (Mother, FG2)

It's a racial issue, not being valued. (Father, FG3)

FGM-safeguarding encounters made those who had previously thought of themselves as 'Good Citizens', which is to say *integrated* and as happily belonging to the UK, suddenly and sharply aware that they were only contingently 'tolerated' rather than fully accepted. What they initially understood to be a misrecognition of themselves by state officials as 'migrants' rather than 'citizens' was actually revealed to be an act of unbelonging in which they were *recognised* as racialised citizens and thus not full or *true* members of the nation.

The 'failed citizen'/undesirable migrant discourse

Foreignness and criminality have been intertwined throughout UK history, such that those perceived as foreigners are routinely constructed as villainous and degenerate and those defined as criminals are constructed (both in law and discourse) as somehow foreign (Griffiths 2017). The construction of 'Somalia' and 'Somalis' in the British media is overwhelmingly within these terms. The country itself is portrayed as a place of endemic violence and misogyny; a *failed state* overrun with pirates and warlords, while those of Somali-heritage in the UK are repeatedly positioned as fraudulent and criminal; the very embodiment of the 'bogus asylum-seeker' and sexually-violent criminal (Carver 2019, 2021; Way 2013). Participants felt that the representation of 'FGM' by politicians, campaigners and in the media was a further manifestation of this discourse, and it resulted in racial profiling, stigmatisation and racist abuse.

Despite the fact that FC/FGM is practised by various peoples across the globe, participants felt strongly that in the UK those with Somali heritage were singled out for FGM-safeguarding, and anecdotal evidence suggests that they are correct.⁵ This may in part reflect demographics, particularly in Bristol where ethnic Somalis form one of the largest ethnic minority groups. But it also likely reflects statistics quoted by the United Nations and World Health Organisation in which Somalia is routinely listed as having a 99% prevalence rate despite the lack of reliable data gathering (Elmusharaf, Elhadi, and Almroth 2006; Karlsen et al. 2022). However, more directly relevant here was the negative media discourse in which Somalia is epitomised as the place of all evils. In the quote below, a participant recounts how Somali parents were invited into the school for a meeting on FGM-safeguarding:

The meeting we had with the headteacher was like, 'the reason we're covering FGM is because it is done by your community.' When I said, 'but there are other communities that do it', he said, 'it's mainly Somali communities we're targeting.' He said, 'In Bristol, the main communities that do it, it's them.' [Then] he turned around and said, 'if there's a bomb that goes off, you know we will withdraw the [permission], so you won't be able to go on holiday.' And I thought, What? So obviously they've been told they can say whatever they want, treat people like how they want, suddenly bombing comes into it. (Mother, FG2)

In this account, the headteacher's understanding is that racial profiling is legitimate and appropriate in the context of FGM-safeguarding, and indeed, part of his job. It also reflects the dominant media discourse of Somalia as a place where only/all bad things happen ('FGM', bombs), and a confusion between FGM-safeguarding and anti-terrorist safeguarding. Even in the absence of specific policy to target Somalis for FGM-safeguarding, Somalis became the target because of prevailing discourse which associated 'Somali' with 'criminal'.

At a deeper level, participants understood FGM-safeguarding encounters to be conducted on the basis that they were ethnically and, thereby, *ethically*, 'Somali'. Tileagă (2006) argues that morality is always implicated in othering discourses, something which has been observed as a key feature of European media and political discourse on refugees (Kirkwood 2017) and also of course in coloniser discourse on the colonised (Fanon 2008; Spivak 1988). In this reading, the discourse surrounding FGM-safeguarding resulted in 'Somalia' being constructed as the quintessential Other: immoral or even amoral.

[They think] that [the Somali] community are cannibals, inhuman, subhuman. (Father, FG3)

For many participants, FGM-safeguarding revealed to them what British people really thought about Somalis, and this was supported by their collective experience. One woman recounted receiving racist abuse outside the school gates in which she was told ‘You are Somali – you eat the things of your daughter! First you mutilate your daughters and then you eat [their private parts], that’s what you call halal meat.’ She understood her attacker to be confusing ‘halal’ with ‘halaleys’, a word used to refer to circumcision, which is taught in FGM-safeguarding workshops delivered in schools. It is pertinent that both of these quotations echo colonial constructions of Black Africans as animalistic and less than human (Fanon 2004[1963]; Yancy 2008). Several participants recounted receiving racist abuse in which ‘FGM’ was specifically employed as a term of abuse and in more than one focus group we were told about racist comments pertaining to ‘FGM’ on a public social media post celebrating the work of the community organisation, ‘Somali Kitchen’.

A lady from the BBC did a little coverage about [the Somali Kitchen] and put it on Facebook. [And] an English lady called Jenny had put a nasty comment saying, I don’t know why people are praising you guys, the only thing you are known for is FGM. (Mother, FG1)

Collectively, these comments bring to mind Fanon’s (2008, 84) evocation of Black identity in a White world as being ‘battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, [and] racial defects’. Participants saw the deployment of ‘FGM’ as a stereotype that could be added to Fanon’s list of Othering identities and a means of ‘battering down’ Somalis and devaluing their civic participation and consequently their claim to belong.

Participants felt that such racism from the public was a direct consequence of the discourse of those in powerful positions:

Media news [presents] all these girls being done, [and people ask] ‘Why are they allowed to do this to children? This is a barbaric culture! They should be taken back to where they come from!’ But nobody has been convicted of having it been done here. But they are putting it out there like thousands of girls are being done. We get a lot of hatred from that. (Mother, FG2)

What is happening on social media, the news, ‘the cutting season’, etc, – [it means that] when people see us walk by, they see like ‘Oh the people who do FGM’. They put label on us, they stigmatize us. (Mother, FG1)

In line with claims by senior British politicians (including Theresa May and David Cameron), British media outlets, whether tabloid, broadsheet or televised, regularly claim that ‘tens of thousands’ – or sometimes hundreds of thousands – of British girls are at risk of ‘FGM’,⁶ especially during the summer holidays which has been discursively reconstructed as ‘the cutting season’.⁷ These figures are based on highly problematic estimates – an analysis of data held by the Home Office, the MOJ and the National Health Service FGM-Enhanced Dataset suggests that the number of UK residents at risk of FC/FGM is more likely to be in the tens rather than the tens of thousands (Karlsen et al. 2022). In several of the focus groups, participants complained that the media and government took it as read that prevalence among Somalis in the UK would be the same as

prevalence among Somalis in Somalia (based on pre-war data), taking no account of drivers for migration, changes in attitudes through migration, and the success of community-led anti-FC/FGM organisations in the UK (e.g. FORWARD) and in Somalia itself:

We are trying to find our identity as British Somalis, and we don't want FGM to be part of that. (Mother, FG2)

We have a life [here], we know what happened [in our culture in the past], we know it's not legal. (Mother, FG1)

They have nothing else to say about us as a community, that's ['FGM'] the only thing. They keep bringing it back, keep refreshing it. And we are all sick and tired of it. (Mother FG2)

For many of the participants, the measures to prevent and reduce the prevalence of 'FGM' contained in the 2015 Act were not only unnecessary but were based on out of date and unreliable statistics and thus were tantamount to a moral panic. Not only were so-called 'Muslim' family practices held to be incompatible with 'British' values as per the Casey Review (2016), but more specifically Somaliness, which had become the de rigour signifier of criminality and foreignness symbolised in political and media discourse on 'FGM'. Participants felt British media and politicians, and the anti-'FGM' lobby constructed Somalis as the quintessential folk devil of the Failed/Foreign Citizen.

'Tolerated citizenship'

Academics have conceptualised the citizenship-belonging nexus as a combination of vertical (with the state) and horizontal (with fellow citizens) relationships (Birkvad 2019). As such a sense of belonging is produced through status recognition, access to rights and notions of identity, but cannot be reduced to one of these things (Joppke 2010). The myth of citizenship lies with its promise that status guarantees both access to rights and recognition of identity as a member (Cohen 2009). Despite the initial input of fellow citizens, FGM-safeguarding quickly took on the mantle of state-orchestrated campaign and was experienced by participants as a vertical, top-down assault on their inclusion which found resonance in horizontal (mis)recognition among the public more widely. FGM-safeguarding resulted in them becoming acutely aware of the contingent 'tolerated' nature of their belonging which resulted in collective ontological insecurity. They spoke repeatedly across the focus groups of the fear FGM-safeguarding engendered, often without specifying exactly what they were afraid of:

I feel fear. I feel hesitant and I feel unfairness as well. Also, I feel that the Somali community are victims. (Father, FG5)

Even I saw one lady, [who was asking for help]. I said to her, 'do you have girls?' [She said] No, but I am still scared because I saw so many other parents who are so scared. (Mother, FG1)

I am traumatized by this. People are frightened, they are really frightened. (Mother, FG2)

Participants reported having lost trust in key civic institutions including schools, the National Health Service (NHS), social services and police in a way which compromised their sense of belonging as well as access to services (Karlsen et al. 2019, 2020). But of

particular significance here was the threat of – and self-limiting consequences of – infringement on their mobility. Participants spoke about being too scared to leave the country, about not being able to enjoy holidays because they were too scared about what they would encounter on return, about having ‘no civil liberty’ because ‘you cannot exercise your right to travel’ (Father, FG3).

The backdrop to this fear was the threat of FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs) which were brought in as an amendment to the FGM Act 2003 by the 2015 Act, which enable the local authority or another relevant person to ask a judge to impose protective measures, such as withholding of the passports of those believed to be potential victims (CPS 2021). This is a civil law measure and cases are heard in the Family Courts where the standard of proof is lower than in criminal proceedings. A breach of an FGMPO, however, is a criminal offence which carries up to five years imprisonment (which would also entail an automatic deportation order for non-citizens), and therefore it can be understood as a form of back-door criminalisation. As of July 2021 covering the first five years of their inception, there had been a total of 501 applications made to the Family Courts for FGMPOs and 717 Orders issued (MoJ 2021). According to our participants coupled with information gained through conferences and workshops attended by the authors, it seems that passport removal (until the child is 18) is the most common measure imposed by an FGMPO, and often the only measure, although medical examination of the child’s genitalia may also feature.⁸

FGMPOs carried significant stigma and shame, and only a few participants in the focus groups volunteered that they had direct experience of this procedure. Those participants strongly articulated their sense of despair and grievance, describing Kafkaesque performances of delay and injustice in which unrepresented defendants were unable or too afraid to challenge evidence which amounted to little more than inference. Fear of FGMPOs, however, was present in all groups. The confiscation of a passport – however temporary and for whatever reason – sends a symbolic message of unbelonging that far outweighs any claim to safeguarding. As Arendt (1968, 9) theorised, freedom of movement is ‘the most elementary’ freedom and also ‘the indispensable precondition for action’.

Denationalisation or citizenship deprivation is typically imagined in relation to those expelled. In the case of the UK, it ‘has been used almost exclusively on [naturalised] citizens originally from Muslim majority countries’ primarily in relation to non-proven terrorist-related activities (Gibney 2020, 2566). But passport deprivation without deportation is also used against a class of (Muslim) suspect citizens, creating a ‘new kind of denizen subject that cannot be officially expelled from the nation-state but instead [is] internally exiled’ (Kapoor and Narkowitz 2019, 57). In this then, the (potential) child victims of ‘FGM’ keep company with those believed guilty of espionage, acts of terrorism and war crimes. The common thread, as elucidated by Gibney (2020) and Kapoor and Narkowitz (2019, 47) is that it reflects ‘another way in which citizenship is exposed as a conditional status for racially marginal subjects’. As well as the symbolic denationalising, passport deprivation entails ‘civic death’ (Gibney 2020, 2551), including restricting freedom of movement and limiting access to the job market and to opening bank accounts, etc. While these latter losses may be less important for children than adults, they nonetheless underscore difference and the rescinding of rights; limiting

children's abilities to go on school trips, to take weekend jobs, to open savings accounts, etc. as well as curbing the rights of their families and siblings.

Conclusion

As has been shown, participants relied on the hegemonic political discourse on 'the politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006) to frame their objections to the discrimination they experienced in FGM-safeguarding encounters; in particular, the ideal-type of the 'Good Citizen' extolled in the naturalisation process and that of the 'Failed Citizen'/bad migrant. However, they challenged the subtext to this discourse in which the non-Citizen Other is understood as value-less. FGM-safeguarding encounters had made participants viscerally aware that the promise of naturalisation – which is to say full and equal inclusion – was empty rhetoric. Their experiences of this crime prevention policy had brought them to question the claimed link between citizenship status and citizenship rights – specifically the 'rights and responsibilities' discourse that underpins the naturalisation process. This in turn led to a re-evaluation of citizenship-as-identity.

Across the Focus Groups, participants described FGM-safeguarding encounters with representatives of the state, be they schoolteachers, social workers or police, as *an act of unbelonging*. For some, this was an issue of poor implementation of the policy (Karlsen et al. 2019). The majority, however, understood the policy itself to be inherently discriminatory. They felt that the criminalisation approach taken by the government resulted in their rights as citizens being denied, particularly the right to freedom of movement. The threat of passport removal and medical examination acted as a deterrence to travel generally, as did the fear of further scrutiny and interrogation which they perceived to be racially targeted. They reported widespread loss of trust in key civic institutions including schools and the NHS and they reported how these experiences had led directly to disengagement with services (Karlsen et al. 2019, 2020).

Tackling FC/FGM has been repeatedly presented as demonstrably anti-racist and as a facet of inclusive citizenship. The co-opting of community-led organisations provided legitimacy to this stance, but ultimately government policy favoured reliance on disciplining and criminalising measures rather than community engagement. Through analysis of this crime prevention policy, we have demonstrated how the legacy of colonial Othering not only remains relevant, but ultimately over-rides anti-racist and inclusive policy intentions. FGM-safeguarding operates through technologies of differentiation which are embedded within post-colonial constructions of citizenship and belonging which make the concept of inclusive citizenship an oxymoron.

Notes

1. We use inverted commas for two purposes. First to highlight the fact that as an acronym 'FGM' has become somewhat divorced from its expanded term which allows it to be used in situations and by actors when it would otherwise be unthinkable, and without regard by those actors for its impact (see Karlsen et al. 2019). Second in recognition that as a term its political origins lie in colonial and missionary disgust of the native Other and the current definition is also a misnomer since it includes practices that are not mutilating whilst not including mutilating practices originating in the West such as cosmetic surgery. We use FC/FGM when not referring specifically to political discourse and 'FGM-

safeguarding' to refer to statutory policy measures. 'FGM' is defined by the World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>.

2. Others have observed similar political rhetoric across Europe (Baker 2020; De Genova 2018).
3. See use of these words by, for example, Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London (2014), David Cameron then PM (2014), and Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London (2019).
4. Although we did not ask participants about their nationality status, given the characteristics of the Somali population in Bristol more broadly (Carver 2019) and given their own narratives and the discourse in the focus groups on citizenship, it can be concluded that most had personal experience of naturalisation.
5. Our research deliberately engaged only with those of Somali heritage but even research on the same issue (Abdelshahid, Smith, and Habane 2021) which actively tried to recruit participants from all FGM-practising countries was predominantly populated with Somalis. Evidence from nation-wide news media also suggests this (e.g. Aviram 2018; MEND, 2019; Mohamed 2017; Mohamed 2018).
6. See for example Cameron, 2014; Local Government Association, 2021; May 2014; Summers in The Guardian (2018).
7. See for example Buck in The Metro (2018); Ellison in The Guardian (2015); Evans in The Sun (2019); Onwordi in the New Humanist (2011).
8. We made a Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Justice for further details in relation to these orders, which was declined as the material was not held centrally (Karlsen et al. 2022).

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