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Political Cognitions on the Repatriation of Women and Children associated with the Islamic State: The case of the United Kingdom's Parliament.

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Master in International Studies

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November, 2021



SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

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Abstract

Nine hundred UK citizens are estimated to have travelled to join ISIS, of those, one hundred and fifty British women and fifty children, both travelled and born on site, were affiliated to ISIS. As of 2020, twenty British women and over sixty children are reportedly stranded in Northeast Syria, with a large proportion being under five years old, since the Caliphate's military defeat in 2019. The present study intends to unveil the political cognitions of the United Kingdom's members of Parliament regarding repatriation of British women and children.

By choice of the student this thesis was delivered without the advisement or revision of the supervisor.

Key words : ISIS, United Kingdom, Repatriation, Women and children

Resumo

Estima-se que, cerca de novecentos cidadãos britânicos tenham viajado para aderir ao ISIS, dos quais cento e cinquenta mulheres e cinquenta crianças britânicas, ambas viajadas e nascidas no local, eram filiadas ao ISIS. Em 2020, vinte mulheres britânicas e mais de sessenta crianças estão presas em campos de refugiados e pessoas internamente deslocadas, no Nordeste da Síria, com uma grande proporção a ter menos de cinco anos, desde a derrota militar do Califado em 2019. O presente estudo pretende revelar as cognições políticas dos membros do Parlamento do Reino Unido relativamente ao repatriamento de mulheres e crianças britânicas.

Por escolha da aluna, esta tese foi submetida sem o aconselhamento ou revisão da orientadora.

Palavras-chave : ISIS, Reino Unido, Repatriação, Mulheres e crianças

Glossary

API - Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention relating to Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts

APII - Protocol regarding the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts

CAT - Convention against torture Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

Con – Conservative Party

CTS – Critical Terrorism Studies

FTFs – Foreign Terrorist Fighters

ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ISIS – Islamic State

Lab – Labour Party

MP – Member of Parliament

OPAC - Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

RSI – Rights and Security International

SCSL - Statute of Special Court for Sierra Leone

SDF – Syrian Democratic Forces

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution

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Introduction

The Islamic State, also addressed in the literature as ISIS, ISIL or simply IS, is one of the most prominent terrorist armed groups that rose from the regional instability devastating Syria and its surroundings since the beginning of its civil war in 2011. As Benedetta Berti and Axel Bea Osete (2015) have noted the group's project is first and foremost political, declaring itself as the only legitimate political system, culminating with the territorial establishment of the Caliphate in 2014, which rejected preexisting states in the Levant region and its borders, establishing itself in both Syria and Iraq, asserting the religious and political authority of its leader over all Muslims. Notwithstanding, its ambitions go beyond statehood reaching the creation of a new distinct socio-political order, implying both the destruction of the enemies of the newborn society and the reeducation of its subjects (Berti and Osete, 2015).

The group's capacity of global recruitment is historically unprecedented (Anderson, 2016), giving rise to the conceptualization of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. It is estimated that around 6,613 to 6,633 Western European citizens have travelled to ISIS territory (Cook and Vale, 2019), more often than not, accompanied by their families, including children, that instantly become citizens of the Islamic State (Anderson, 2016) susceptible to be recruited to the ranks of the organization. As such, the family dimension is particularly connected with the phenomenon of FTFs. The radicalized individuals who travel to ISIS' territory, tend to bring their families along or build family on site, with a lot of children being born to FTFs, very often exposing them to recruitment. The conjuncture of said children is one of constant exposure to the group's ideology, spread out in schools and training camps, and reinforced at home (Al-Bayan Center, 2016).

The Caliphate was militarily defeated in March 2019, when the group lost the remainder of its territories in Syria and Iraq, moment when a lot of the citizens who travelled to ISIS territory during the years of conflict have tried to return to their countries of origin. However, as of 2021 it is estimated that only 30% of the around 5000 European citizens who travelled to join ISIS have returned, with particular incidence on women and children (Laytouss, 2021).

Nine hundred UK citizens are estimated to have travelled to join ISIS, of those, 150 British women and 50 children, both travelled and born on site, were affiliated to ISIS, however, unverified sources placed the second figure on around 100 (Cook and Vale, 2019). As of 2018, only 4 minors and 2 women were recorded to have returned to the UK, however, when dealing with minor affiliates it can also be the case that they returned after turning 18 years old (Cook and Vale, 2019). As of 2020, 25 British women and over 60 children are reportedly stranded in Northeast Syria, with a large proportion being under 5, reflecting the likelihood of having been born on theatre and therefore, possessing no formal documentation (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020).

The present project is oriented by ontological and epistemological stands which strongly derive from the core notions in which the growing field of critical scholarship, specifically, the one of Critical Terrorism Studies are rooted (CTS), committed to “reflexivity” and “methodological and disciplinary pluralism” in the critical inquisitive of the traditional comprehensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (Stump and Dixit, 2011, p.200).

The values holding this analysis are, thus, intrinsically connected to those of CTS, being strongly concerned with fundamental human rights and security, social justice, equality and surpassing the conventional definitions of security forged around nationhood, entailing the prominence of State’s interest over any other actor (Jackson, 2007).

The main goal of the examination followed through in this dissertation is the one of understanding, through the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the meanings structuring the argumentative and rhetorical schemes employed by British politicians when discussing FTFs and women and children associated with ISIS, with special focus on the latter. In order to do so, four House of Commons’ debates will be scrutinised, through the framework of Van Dijk’s methodology focusing on the discursive patterns and political cognitions (1997) behind said schemes guided by the following research questions:

- Is there a punitive or a comprehensive political argumentative framework regarding the return and repatriation of the women and children linked with ISIS?
 - Are British women and children associated with ISIS addressed in parliamentary discussions as firstly victims or international criminals?
 - How is the United Kingdom’s own responsibility in the repatriation of British linked women and children, trapped in refugee and displaced people camps’ in Syria addressed in Parliamentary discussions?
 - Where there is possibility of assessing the evolution of the discussion are there any narrative/argumentative changes?

In order to arrive to informed conclusions this study is comprised of three main levels of analysis, reflected in its three main chapters. In the first chapter a brief contextualization of the Caliphate, Islamic State’s territory, and its consequent military defeat is highlighted, also

reflecting the roles played by women and children in the realm of the organizations and its implications to both national security and repatriation efforts. In the second chapter the ontology and epistemology of the analysis is set forwards, as are the theoretical framework and the data collection and analysis methodologies. The third chapter reflects on the analysis of the four chosen parliamentary debates. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in order to better comprehend how political cognitions are reflected in policy making and thus, understand what might be expected for the future on the repatriation of British women and children associated with ISIS.

Chapter I : Literature Review

The Islamic State : Brief contextualization

The Islamic State, also addressed in the literature as ISIS (henceforward), ISIL or simply IS, is one of the most prominent terrorist armed groups that rose from the regional instability devastating Syria and its surroundings since the beginning of its civil war in 2011. As Benedetta Berti and Axel Bea Osete (2015) have noted the group's project is first and foremost political, declaring itself as the only legitimate political system, culminating with the territorial establishment of the Caliphate in 2014, which rejected preexisting states in the Levant region and its borders, establishing itself in both Syria and Iraq, asserting the religious and political authority of its leader over all Muslims. Notwithstanding, its ambitions go beyond statehood reaching the creation of a new distinct socio-political order, implying both the destruction of the enemies of the newborn society and the reeducation of its subjects (Berti and Osete, 2015).

Therefore, the group is particularly linked with the recruitment of child soldiers from a very young age, under the status of "Cubs of the Caliphate" which carry both short and long term goals. On the one hand, short term reasons have to do with military tactical gains in the context of armed conflict, given the fact that children can easily blend in, adding for the element of surprise, especially when regarding suicide missions. On the other hand, the long term gains present themselves in the possibility of breeding the future generations of the Jihadist movement, ensuring the longevity of the 'caliphate', making up for the symbolic and ideological realm of the construct (Bloom, 2018).

It is precisely this longitudinal approach that sets the difference between the Islamic State and most terror organizations, its use of children is systemic and systematic and while most groups try to hide their deployment of children, ISIS is extremely transparent regarding this practice. Moreover, the group has grown to understand the importance of starting the indoctrination process as young as possible in order to be able to forge children's identity, moral and social values, when their ideas are not yet built becoming more susceptible to the group's ideology, ensuring future

and undeniable compliance (Anderson, 2016). The challenge represented in this dynamic is that children indoctrinated at early stages of their lives are not familiar with other ways of living, being able to accept ISIS' values and practices as right and normal, lacking any exposure to counter narratives (Anderson, 2016).

The group's capacity of global recruitment is historically unprecedented (Anderson, 2016), giving rise to the conceptualization of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). It is estimated that around 6,613 to 6,633 Western European citizens have travelled to ISIS territory (Cook and Vale, 2019), more often than not, accompanied by their families, including children, that instantly become citizens of the Islamic State (Anderson, 2016) susceptible to be recruited to the ranks of the organization. As such, the family dimension is particularly connected with the phenomenon of FTFs. The radicalized individuals who travel to ISIS' territory, tend to bring their families along or build family on site, with a lot of children being born to FTFs, very often exposing them to recruitment. The conjuncture of said children is one of constant exposure to the group's ideology, spread out in schools and training camps, and reinforced at home (Al-Bayan Center, 2016).

The fall of the Caliphate – Implications for the women and children associated with ISIS

The Caliphate was militarily defeated in March 2019, when the group lost the remainder of its territories in Syria and Iraq, and in lesser levels during the conflict years, a lot of the citizens who travelled to ISIS territory during the years of conflict have tried to return to their countries of origin. However, as of 2021 it is estimated that only 30% of the around 5000 European citizens who travelled to join ISIS have returned, with particular incidence on women and children (Laytouss, 2021).

Women

In the first large wave of FTFs' returns from the Islamic State, a soft and more comprehensive approach was built towards women who left to join the group, under State's believe that the roles they played in the Caliphate were secondary to the groups' activity, and therefore, the national security threat posed by them was considered to be reduced (EPRS, 2018). However, it is acknowledged that, once weakened by international excursions, ISIS upgraded women's roles in the Caliphate, actively engaging them in the group's military activity (Cook and Vale, 2018). On top of that in the wake of a 2016 discovery of group of French women plotting a bombing in Notre Dame, European governments' have shifted to much more regularly investigating and prosecuting women returning from the ISIS territory, even when not directly linked with planning, under fear of the radicalisation and jihadist networks they may bring (Dworkin, 2019). Nevertheless, their traditional and more prominent roles are attributed are in the domestic and religious realms, being responsible for the diffusion of ISIS' ideology in their homes and children, as well as the

maintenance of the house and the support of the husbands (Benotman and Malik, 2016), to whom they are attributed from the age of 9 (EPRS, 2018).

Children

Children, as young as six, begin their formation as spies, taught to share information on people surrounding them in order to assure compliance to the Caliphate's rule. If proved valuable they move on to roles which entail greater responsibility. Those who show high communicative skills are used to spread the Islamic State ideology, gather support and recruit others. The role of soldiers is the more prominent one with multiple propaganda tools showing children, from the age of 9, being trained to an array of military positions. The role of executioners also gained a lot of propaganda value (Benotman and Malik, 2017).

Due to the longitudinal prospects ISIS' placed on children, they have often been addressed as 'ticking time bombs', with States being advised by various Officials as is the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator, that raised the urgency to deal with both women and children, still stranded on the territories, in order to mitigate the effects of life on ISIS territories (Kington, 2019).

Most of the European children who travelled to ISIS with their families or were born there, are still being held in Refugee and Internally Displaced People Camps' in Northern Syria. A Center for Global Policy report estimates that around 12,000 to 13,500 foreign women and children are being held by Kurdish authorities in the Al Hawl, and Al Roj camps, with a November 2019 cited statement from an official at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of 700 to 750 children of European Union nationals living in the former. At the time of the report al- Hawl comprised an increasing population of 68.000 Islamic State refugees, from which around 94 percent are women and children living in extremely unstable and insecure conditions, given that the most radical residents have taken control of much of the camp (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020).

The conceptualization of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and the women and children associated with the Islamic State in the international system

The concept of FTFs was firstly institutionalized in the 2014 United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178, as "individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict" (2014, p.1). Arising from the definition a number of issues was raised given that under it even individuals, typically women and children, who joined ISIS but were not directly involved with the groups' military activity are at risk of being swiftly labelled

as FTFs (Capone, 2019). As such, in the moment or prior to their return, or repatriation, women are prosecuted as terrorists, facing criminal investigation and criminal measures (Capone, 2019). On the same manner, this definition enforces the immediate association of all FTFs as terrorist fighters, regarding armed conflict, but dismissing the case of child soldiers, which are, in traditional settings, always regarded as victims first. The classification of children as terrorists should only be held with clear evidence of such involvement (Nyamutata, 2020). What is also striking in this definition is the fact that it entails individual responsibility and will, which none of the children who are taken to the territory by their families or are born there, have.

Together with the UNSCR 2396 (2017), the two Resolutions set up the international institutional guiding framework for States' affected by the phenomenon, deepening the international obligations of the development and implementation of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for all FTFs and their accompanying family members, including children, with the latter setting separate frameworks for both groups. The 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles and its 2018 Addendum provide additional guidance to States' focusing on stemming FTFs flows, including the return and relocation of "women and children associated with foreign terrorist fighters" (2018, p.32), paying attention to their specificities, ensuring compliance with international law regarding said groups, "while taking into account the best interest of the child" (2018, p.32).

Aware of the fast moving progression of these dynamics, the 2019 UN document comprising the key principles for the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to UN listed terrorist groups reinforces that Member States should act in compliance with the obligations provided to them under International Law regarding women and children and ensure better coordination and coherence in the international efforts to address these challenges (2019).

The Repatriation Imperative of Women and Children associated with ISIS and associated dilemmas

According to March 2019 ICRC publication regarding "Syria's Al Hol Camp: Families in Desperate Need", approximately 49,000 minors reside in the camp, from which around 8,000 are foreign children born or relocated with their families, several hundreds of whom are now separated from their guardians or even orphaned. For those born on sight and remaining there, undocumented status and legal statelessness might restrict access to immediate benefits and aid inside camps (cited in Cook and Vale, 2019).

For minors trying to return to their's or their parents' countries, stripping or denying citizenship is even more problematic adding another layer to the difficulties of reintegration in society, creating obstacles to access benefits, rights, and services that are needed to facilitate and

safeguarding it. States' approaches to the return and repatriation of women and children have been varied, however, in recent years, repatriation and rehabilitation of minors is a more common point of agreement and concession, yet there still have been some differentiation in those efforts, more allocated to specific groups, such as unaccompanied infants or orphans (Cook and Vale, 2019).

In a 2020 press release, the UN's Security Council, asserts that repatriation of both FTFs and the women and children associated with ISIS is paramount to facing and mitigating the threat posed by ISIS, comprising asserting declarations from Vladimir Voronkov, under-secretary-general of the UN Office of counter-terrorism, that "the global threat from ISIL is likely to increase if the international community fails to address pressing challenges" (2020, p.1). Moreover, the communication regards the exacerbation of the instability and unsustainability of the situation of Syria in Iraq, as it is estimated that over 10 000 ISIS' fighters are still active, organizing themselves freely in small sells (2020) which exacerbates the risk of further radicalization and human rights violations towards both women and children stranded in camps. As such, leaving the families in the camps risks the deepening of the resentment towards national states, which will pose serious security challenges if left unattended (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020).

Similarly, the Council of Europe's Assembly urges that all member States dealing with FTFs and accompanying women and children must (1) "take all necessary measures to ensure immediate repatriation of all children whose parents believed to be affiliated to ISIS/Daesh, are citizens of their State, regardless of their age or degree of involvement in the conflict", (2) "repatriate children together with their mothers or primary care givers, unless it is not in the best interest of the child", (3) "avoid taking measures which could result in a child becoming stateless, including by ensuring that every child is registered", (4) "provide urgent assistance to all children in the camps and detention centres in Syria and Iraq with a view to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in these facilities, and to delivering sustainable care and protection to all child victims regardless of their nationality" and (5) "raise public awareness of the situation of the children concerned, based on reliable data, with a view to alleviating public concerns related to national security" (p.2).

Although some national jurisdictions allow for the revocation of citizenship under defined terms, under international law the practice is illegal if such decision would render one stateless. This is especially accounted for in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, article 8(1) and 9, which respectively proscribing that Contracting States "shall not deprive a person of its nationality if such deprivation would render him stateless" and "may not deprive any person or group of persons of their nationality on racial, ethnic, religious or political grounds". Furthermore, article 13(2) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 12 (4) of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),

respectively, everyone has the right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to said country and no one should be "arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter" one's own country. On this subject the Human Rights Committee argues that States' must not prevent a person from entering one's national country, even if born abroad (1999).

Regarding children born to European citizens in ISIS territory, the Human Rights Watch expressed concerns about the birth registrations that will most likely not be recognized by the international community – potentially leaving children stateless (Houry, 2016, cited in Heide and Geenen, 2017). However, despite no legitimate documentation existing, there are still a lot of possibilities to assist and repatriate the minor born in conflict zones, including many countries' legal mechanisms which allow for the granting of nationality based on parentage. Nonetheless, in this multilayer phenomenon, another challenge arises with the granting of citizenship under *jus sanguinis*, given the fact that a large portion of these children might be missing both parents or guardians, and its application differs from country to country (Milton and Rassler, 2019).

Nevertheless, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's Roadmap on Treatment of Children Associated with terrorist and Extremist Groups states "It should be ensured that Member States under no circumstances, by act or omission, implement policies that effectively render children stateless. In this regard, it is important that Member States, rather than stripping dual-nationals of their citizenship, accept children born of their nationals, grant them nationality and take proactive actions to prevent statelessness" highlighting that "Under international human rights law, children have the right to return to their country and limitations on this right must be lawful, pursuant to a legitimate aim, as well as necessary and proportionate" (2019, p.4).

In early 2018, Julian King, EU Commissioner for the Security Union, noted the urgency for Member States' recognition of these minors and the adoption of a case-by-case approach for their return and reintegration (Chew, 2017, cited in Cook and Vale, 2018), keeping in mind the importance of age and gender in the security implications they might pose, as addressed in the first section.

Due to national security concerns and a broadly hostile public opinion towards repatriation, despite repatriation of minors gaining momentum since 2018, countries have given priority to orphaned children and national efforts have been limited and ad-hoc. As such, European governments have so far fail towards repatriation of all citizens, focusing only on the groups of unaccompanied and orphaned children (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020). What we are witnessing in European States' approach to FTFs and their families can be compared to the well known 'externalization' strategy on migration, however, in this case governments are trying to keep away their own citizens. More often, responsibility towards such citizens is avoided under

the fact that they are not free to move and, as such, can't return to the countries of origin (Dworkin, 2019).

Another layer of this complex framework comes at the expense of the traditional approach of maintaining family unity because of the fact that families were, in the majority of cases, instruments of indoctrination and radicalization, despite parents having endangered their children in the first place, separation, repatriation and reintegration need to be assessed in a case to case basis, at the risk of aggravating trauma for children (Cook and Vale, 2019). However, most officials advice that family separation is not applied, unless the mother's presence clearly deters children welfare, implying the need for receiving countries to conceive a concerted repatriation framework, allowing that both groups are repatriated and directed towards the necessary systems, even if criminal investigations towards the mothers is needed (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020). European countries have, however, limited their repatriation efforts towards cases where the choice whether to bring adults together with the children doesn't apply, as is the case of orphaned children. In some cases, women have waved their parenting rights in order to make possible the repatriation of their children but many can not bear to be separated from them. Other reported cases show women being held in prisons together with their children, in a clear violation of international law (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020).

International legal Framework on States' obligations towards the repatriation of women and children

The child soldering framework

The increasing flow of European Returnees from the Islamic State, considering the loss of its physical Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, specifically minor returnees, entails questions about the responsibilities of their's or their families' countries of origin, from which jurisdiction they are under, defined in the international legal framework regarding minor's participation in armed conflict.

International law does not, directly, enforce the straightforward obligation of the repatriation of women and children associated with FTFs. Nevertheless, a large number of international relevant commitments established under varied judicial fields impel repatriation as the best way to guarantee compliance with the international legal framework in place and interrupt the perpetuation of violence to which women and children find themselves exposed to, both in the context of life under the Caliphate, and the subsequent defeat of ISIS which left them stranded in refugee and displaced people's camps, exposed to diverse human rights' violation in particular under the jurisdiction of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Capone, 2019). Moreover, it is worth noting that under international counterterrorism law around FTFs, as are the UNSCRs addressed

above and the rehabilitation and reintegration imperative towards children affected by all forms of violence, as are armed conflicts, addressed in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, States are required to ensure that all measures are taken to ensure that children are in an environment which nurtures health, self-respect and dignity, which is not the case of the detention camps (Capone, 2019).

As has been highlighted before child soldiers participating in armed conflict, whether on national or opposition armed forces, do not necessarily take on the role of fighters. For that reason the 2007 Paris Principles adopted the far-reaching terminology of “A child associated with an armed force or armed group” referring to “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities” (Paris Principles, 2007, p. 7). In this definition and the ones following “Armed forces refers to the armed forces of a State” and “Armed groups” refers to groups distinct from armed forces as defined by Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Paris Principles, 2007, p. 7).

The recruitment of children and their participation in armed conflict has been prohibited and criminalized in an extensive body of binding and non-binding provisions regulating child soldiering under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law.

The obligation to abstain from the aforementioned practice is established in the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention relating to Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (API), Article 77(2), stating that “The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, the Parties to the conflict shall endeavor to give priority to those who are oldest” which is reiterated in the Protocol regarding the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (APII), Article 4(3).

Nonetheless, given the non-international character of the APII, its provision entails a clear duty mandatory to all Parties, rather than the former of taking “all feasible measures” granting it a certain degree of subjectivity (Capone, 2017). Despite neither Syria nor Iraq having ratified the document, the 2002 Statute of Special Court for Sierra Leone (henceforward, SCSL) states “The Special Court shall have the power to prosecute persons who committed the following serious violations of international humanitarian law: ... conscripting or enlisting children under the age

of 15 years into armed forces or groups; ... using [children under the age of 15 years] ... to participate actively in hostilities”, constituting it as crime under international customary law (ICRC Customary IHL database, last update, 2014), binding upon all parties of the armed conflict.

Under International Human Rights Law there are also binding treaties and non-binding documents encompassing State’s duty to refrain from the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict (Capone, 2017).

On the same note, the Convention against torture Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), entails, under articles 2(1) and 16(1), that States’ must act on their own jurisdictions as to “prevent torture or other ill-treatment extra territorially” (1984). As such, States must be responsible for failing to prevent departures and are bound to repatriating FTF, women and children in order to positively respond to the provisions enshrined in the document.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child states, in Article 38, that “States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities”. This age limit creates a ‘loophole of non-protection’ (McBride, 2014, p.26, cited in Capone, 2017, p.167), applying to children over 15 regardless of the Convention defining childhood and consequent special protection until the age of 18.

The dilemma that arises from this conjuncture is that when put in the context of Syria and Iraq regions, which having not signed any of the mentioned documents are only under obligations provided by the SCSL decision which constitutes international customary law, this loophole creates even more serious implications, as children from 15 to 18 are denied the possibility of being regarded as child soldiering victims (Nyamutata, 2020).

The 2000 Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (henceforward, OPAC) somehow addresses the abovementioned shortcomings by raising the minimum age limit for direct participation in hostilities (Article 1) and compulsory recruitment into State’s armed forces (Article 2) to the age of 18. However, despite article 3 providing that “States Parties shall raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national armed forces from that set out in article 38, paragraph 3, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking account of the principles contained in that article and recognizing that under the Convention persons under the age of 18 years are entitled to special protection”, article 4 entails the absolute prohibition of the recruiting, whether compulsory or voluntary, and participation in hostilities of people under the age of 18 by “Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State” (ICRC Database, last updated, 2014). What one can gather from this asymmetry in the applicability of the treaty is that sovereignty, security and military considerations are somewhat prevailing over children’s protection and wellbeing (Capone, 2017).

This trend is inverted in non-binding documents, which tend to have their focus on children's best interests, invoking a 'straight 18' approach which is still not present in any binding body of law (Capone, 2017, p. 168). An example of such are the most famous 1996 Graça Machel's report on the impact of armed conflict on children, the 1997 Cape Town Principles, and the already mentioned 2007 Paris Commitments and Principles.

It is also worth recalling the 1999 International Labour Organization Convention No 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour which includes in article 3(a) the "(...)forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict", children being defined in the document as people under 18.

In the specific framework of this dissertation, foreign women and children in ISIS ranks, the applicable regime is the same, however its implementation also concerns the States of origin. As referenced above in article 4 of the OPAC, armed groups distinct from States' armed forces, which include terrorist groups, are subject to stricter recruitment and participation rules. Notwithstanding, the countries where the Islamic States has its major stage, Syria and Iraq, have not ratified the Treaty meaning that such groups operating in their territory are subjected to the more flexible regime established under customary international law setting the minimum limits at 15 years old (*Prosecutor vs Sam Hinga Norman*, 'Decision on Preliminary Motion Based on Lack of Jurisdiction (Child Recruitment)', 31 May 2004, Special Court for Sierra Leone, cited in Capone, 2017).

Despite this, European foreign fighters and their families have nationality of countries which are signatories of the International Human Rights Law Treaties relevant for this matter, which also apply extraterritorially, highlighting the scope of their jurisdiction and responsibilities towards these citizens (Capone, 2017). On the same note, Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (CRC, 1989), implying a jurisdiction that surpasses national borders, complying with its extraterritorial application which was also confirmed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the International Court of Justice (Capone, 2017).

In its 2005 General Comment No.6 relating to the Treatment of Accompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, the Committee highlighted "as underage recruitment and participation in hostilities entails a high risk of irreparable harm involving fundamental human rights, including the right to life, States' obligations stemming from Article 38 of the Convention, in conjunction with Articles 3 and 4 of the OPAC, entail extraterritorial

effects (...)” (cited in Capone, 2017, p. 169). This implies the continuous nature of the States of origin’s obligations even when the children is no longer in their territory, and the reinforcement of article 4(2) of the OPAC entailing that “States Parties shall take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use (by Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State), including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices” (OPAC, 2000).

The logistic difficulties of upholding the responsibilities in both International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law outside States’ territory, shifts the focus towards their establishment into more preventive action, the one of preventing children’s departure and radicalization. However, the supposedly preventive measures have had a different practical meaning with the tools implemented in response to the 2014 United Nations’ Resolution 2178 being largely focused on securitization narratives, repression and deterrence, which have been reflected in punitive approaches towards both adults and children (Capone, 2017). This demonstrates a governmental focus on short term goals, as is tackling potential terrorists and stopping them to join ISIS, rather than the long-term goal of addressing the factors that may have originated their radicalization (Capone, 2017).

On the same note, not addressing the needs of the European citizens, specifically European children, left behind in former ISIS territory, ignoring States’ jurisdiction and responsibilities towards them elaborated above, risks renewing this cycle by turning what could be a welfare issue into a security threat through allowing further radicalization and deepening resentment towards the West, which might represent a new terrorist cycle in the future implying new counterterrorist strategies rather than rehabilitation ones (The Children of ISIS Detainees: Europe’s Dilemma, Center for Global Policy, 2020).

Adding to International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the field of International Criminal Law also addresses the dilemma of child soldering. The conscription, enlistment or use of children under 15 in hostilities is a war crime, granting individual criminal responsibility to the perpetrators (Drumbl, 2012, cited in Capone, 2017) being listed in the Statutes of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as has been described above and of the International Criminal Court.

In the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court the practice is criminalized in Article 8 (2) defining war crimes, points (b)(xxvi) and (e)(vii), applicable to violations in the framework of international armed conflict and non-international armed conflict respectively, of “Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities” (1998).

Despite the differentiations between compulsory and voluntary enlistment, neither the Statutes of International courts nor domestic criminal legislations foresee legal accountability for

children given that enlistment responsibility falls ultimately on the recruiters. Nevertheless, within the framework of children associated with terrorist groups the application of such tends to take a punitive approach, regarding them as young terrorist representing security threats for Western countries (Nyamutata, 2020) blurring the line between victims and perpetrators (Capone, 2017).

Even though many domestic jurisdictions allow for the prosecution of children on charges of extraordinary international crimes (Drumbl, 2007, cited in Capone, 2017) in other settings comprising the phenomenon of child soldiering, States have refrained from prosecuting crimes committed by children during their association with armed forces or groups, in concordance with article 26 of the Rome Statute which defines “The Court shall have no jurisdiction over any person who was under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged commission of a crime” (1998) and such prosecutions are extremely rare. Furthermore, it is worth noting article 37 (a)(b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prescribe respectively that no child “shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age; shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time” (1998).

However, countries dealing with children associated with armed groups defined as terrorist have implied different strategies (Human Rights Watch, 2016, cited in Capone, 2017). When addressing the previously mentioned 2014 United Nations’ Resolution 2178 most origin countries dealing with the phenomenon of FTF’s adopted extremely severe criminal justice measures going beyond the recruiters to those who travel or attempt to join ISIS territory, those who undergo terrorist training and in some countries even those who are online self-trained (Capone, 2017), making the case that children associated with terrorist groups tend to be regarded first as security threats rather than victims, being more likely to be subjected to punitive practices rather than welfare initiatives and rehabilitation.

As so, in spite no children having been tried in their country of origin because of crimes committed while on ISIS territory, many of the European countries which are now beginning to face an increase in FTF returnees’ numbers are updating the criminal law framework surrounding such groups (Capone, 2017).

The most controversial legislative standards adding to this already difficult framework is the one of defining the minimum age of criminal responsibility, which ultimately is a decision of each country. Keeping in mind the abovementioned article 37(a)(b), a new challenge arises with

minor returnees of the Islamic State. The violent upbringing provided by the group exposed in the previous section means that almost every child in its ranks returning to Europe might have committed what can be considered as war crimes, which entails countries' responsibility to arrest and detain said children, yet it would be a serious mistake not to try and rehabilitate them (Benotman and Malik, 2016). It would also be a violation of the special protection granted to them under International Humanitarian Law which set the minimum age of recruitment by armed groups at 15 years old, being deemed too young to fight, then "he or she must also be considered too young to be held criminally responsible" while associated with the group (Children and Justice During and in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict, 2011, cited in Benotman and Malik, 2016, p.79).

Furthermore, the 1985 Beijing Rules established by the United Nations regarding standard minimum rule for the administration of juvenile justice state in Rule 4 "In those legal systems recognizing the concept of the age of criminal responsibility for juveniles, the beginning of that age shall not be fixed at too low an age level, bearing in mind the facts of emotional, mental and intellectual maturity".

According to a legislative compilation made by Child Rights International Network, the minimum ages of criminal responsibility in the European Union range from 10 to 17 following different definitions of "responsibility" and seriousness of offences. In the majority of these countries it is established at 14 years old.

When it comes to the United Kingdom (UK), the age of criminal responsibility is set at 10 in both England and Wales, however, children from 10 to 17 are in risk of being arrested and brought to court and, by law, after 18 being treated as adults by the criminal justice system . In Scotland, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is as low as 8 and under its 2010 Criminal Justice and Licensing Act, may be prosecuted for an offence after the age of 12.

Despite the lack of international consensus in this matter, reflected in the broad variation in the definition of the age of criminal responsibility, and the fact that by their low setting in many juvenile criminal systems one can infer these do not put child's best interests first, the international provisions highlighted here make up for the victim-first approach, conferring radicalized children a different treatment from adults in the rehabilitation and reintegration conjuncture (Benotman and Malik, 2016).

In the words of the UN Secretary General "The effective reintegration of children formerly associated with groups perpetrating violent extremism should be a priority. However, in Member States' response to violent extremism, children are often systematically treated as security threats rather than as victims, and are administratively detained or prosecuted for their alleged association. Depriving children of liberty following their separation is contrary not only

to the best interests of the child, but also to the best interests of society as a whole. This approach further complicates efforts to reintegrate children, given that it separates them from their families and can also lead to the creation of community grievances” (Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General, cited in Capone, 2017, p. 185). In the specific conjuncture of the Islamic State, specifically children from European citizens which chose to travel there, or those who were already born on sight, family separation might be necessary, however, that decision needs to be carefully implemented and safeguarded. More on this subject will be addressed in the next sections.

Notwithstanding, what is worth noting is the international recognition of the repressive and punitive practices being applied in most cases regarding children associated with the Islamic State rather than the compliance with the special protection granted to children in binding and non-binding international legal instruments and States’ responsibility to their reintegration and rehabilitation highlighted in Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, prescribing States Parties to “take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child” (1989).

What authors such as Conrad Nyamutata push for is then that the victimhood approach applied in traditional settings of child soldiers, regarding them as victims first, be extended to children associated with the Islamic State, regarding them as child soldiers rather than young terrorists in the first instance, underlining the complex and multilayered nature of trauma-related disorders or aggressive behavior deriving from a socialization into violence. Moreover, the author argues the continuity of victimhood for those who are passed the age of 18 years old at time of prosecution, highlighting the complex nature of trauma-related disorders and aggressive behavior deriving from a socialization into violence (2020).

Although ISIS-associated youth’s commitment to causes of the group cannot be ignored and must be assessed, the role of indoctrination practices and violent socialization should also be regarded in the enlistment decision. The sample of this dissertation, children, in particular, those born into ISIS or joining together with their families had nothing to do with the enlistment decision, becoming victims of a socialization to which they could hardly escape. With that in mind, the author makes the case that under international criminal law minors formerly associated with ISIS should be considered as child soldiers, rather than young terrorists, benefitting from the legal protections available to children associated with armed conflict (Nyamutata, 2020).

In such cases where there is evidence against children who perpetrated crimes against civilians, a victim-first approach, addressing the implications of being under the continuous custody of ISIS and entailing rehabilitation, is encouraged, especially in cases of radicalized minors even if prosecuted after the legal minority age (Nyamutata, 2020).

In this matter, the 2018 UN Security Council Resolution 2427, outlines protections for children affected by armed conflict, including that children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law, including those who have committed crimes.

In the words of the EU counter-terrorism director these children “ may be both security threats and victims. The fact that they pose a threat does not lessen the fact that they were victims, similar to other children in armed conflict. A key challenge will be to develop a multidisciplinary response to address both the security and the welfare / child protection aspects relating to child returnees. In the short term, there is a concern for the child's own welfare, but they could also have violent tendencies which present a risk to the welfare of others, particularly other children. In the longer term (and one could argue, in the short term, too), there is a risk of terrorism if early intervention is not provided” (Member States' approaches to dealing with accompanying family members of Foreign Terrorist Fighter Returnees, in particular children: Results of the questionnaire and follow-up, 2017, p.2).

With rising returnees' numbers and European children still being held in Syria and Iraq which will have to return the urge for securitization and criminalization will follow in order to neutralize the perceived threat, however distinctions regarding age and setting of recruitment will have to be taken into account with respect to the special protection granted to children under international bodies of law and juvenile justice standards which emphasize alternatives to detention and prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration as has been highlighted in this section. A consistent approach will require Western countries' initiatives to treat children associated with ISIS as victims first (Nyamutata, 2020).

The case of the United Kingdom

Due to extreme securitization of the data available to Governments and the lack of international institutional presence on ISIS' territories, the assessment of the numbers of women and children, both already returned and still on site, are extremely hard to accomplish (Cook and Vale, 2019).

A July 2019 study conducted by Joana Cook and Gina Vale, forges the most accurate effort of estimating the number of women and minor affiliates by country, including both those who travelled to Islamic State's Caliphate territory and those born on sight, and minor returnees. According to the authors, Western Europe countries account for 21 to 25% of the estimate total

percentage of foreign women and minor affiliates. The authors estimate that, in total, 900 UK citizens travelled to join ISIS, of those, 150 British women and 50 children, both travelled and born on site, were affiliated to ISIS, however, unverified sources placed the second figure on around 100 (Cook and Vale, 2019). As of 2018, only 4 minors and 2 women were recorded to have returned to the UK, however, when dealing with minor affiliates it can also be the case that they returned after turning 18 years old (Cook and Vale, 2019). As of 2020, 25 British women and over 60 children are reportedly stranded in Northeast Syria, with a large proportion being under 5, reflecting the likelihood of having been born on theatre and therefore, possessing no formal documentation (Francois and Ibrahim, 2020).

The legal and political approaches brought forward by receiving, national states, have been inconsistent, although punitive, ranging from denial of entrance to revocation of citizenship, appearing to be driven by political whims and security concerns of said countries rather than by the normative standards established around child soldering, instead regarding them as young terrorists (Nyamutata, 2020), highlighting a narrative implying nothing else rather than national security and border management.

The UK seems to be no exception, showing a firm commitment to citizenship revocation of nationals associated with ISIS, invalidating their children's return and risking leaving them stateless (Nyamutata, 2020), and to the application of Temporary Exclusion Orders, keeping individuals outside of the country (Braun, 2018). Despite the illegality, under international law, of revoking citizenship if someone would be rendered stateless, the UK has been preying on technicalities in order to immediately remove citizenship to dual citizens or citizens which, according to Government, are entitled to citizenship of another country (Dworkin, 2019).

The continued security-first approach extended to affiliated women and minors has resulted in a very small number of repatriations, with a considerate proportion of British women and children being left at the hands of the authorities in site, neglecting minors' welfare and development. This approach risks bringing deeper problems in the future, as exacerbating the alienation and stigmatization will, undoubtedly, result in a deepening of the Jihadis identity which they were indoctrinated into, initiating a new cycle of grievances similar to those that allowed the rise of the Islamic State and its ability to attract FTFs at an unprecedented level (Cook and Vale, 2019).

Despite several reports and campaigns from international humanitarian organizations such as Rights and Security International (RSI), Human Rights Watch and Save the Children, highlighting the severe and quickly aggravating conditions in the camps to which stranded women and children are exposed to, endangering not just their well being but also their survival, many British women and children are still confined to the camps due to lack of repatriation efforts from

the Government, which have been “sporadic” and “infrequent”. According to RSI, “In total, the UK has only repatriated seven children – including three in November 2019 and one in September 2020 – and has not yet repatriated any adult women, some of whom the Home Secretary has deprived of their British citizenship”, against international advice which remains that the best option to deal with both security and humanitarian issues is to repatriate children together with their mother or main caregivers (RSI, 2021).

Given the apparent discrepancy between what the international system and law dictate regarding the framework of women and children associated with ISIS and their repatriation and the UK’s reluctance to pursue its obligations towards its own citizens, this project aims to understand what the main political arguments and narratives are justifying the course of action thus far towards these groups. The next chapter highlights the methodology framework under which this goal will be pursued.

Chapter II: Methodology

Being an undergoing, and fast progressing phenomenon the goal of this analysis will be to understand the main argumentation schemes and narratives being built, at the political level, in the UK, regarding its own responsibility towards the British women and children associated with ISIS.

As such, the main goal of this project is to grasp an understanding of the meanings structuring the argumentative and rhetorical schemes employed by British politicians when discussing FTFs and women and children associated with ISIS, with special focus on the latter.

In order to do so, four House of Commons’ debates will be scrutinised, through the framework of Van Dijk’s methodology, which will be highlighted next, focusing on the discursive patterns and political cognitions (1997) behind said schemes.

Epistemology and Ontology

Focusing on this research’s design, it is important to frame its main ontological and epistemological stands which strongly derive from the core notions in which the growing field of critical scholarship, specifically, the one of Critical Terrorism Studies are rooted (henceforward, CTS). First and foremost, CTS, is committed to “reflexivity” and “methodological and disciplinary pluralism” in the critical inquisitive of the traditional comprehensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (Stump and Dixit, 2011, p.200).

CTS is, thus, concerned with the impacts of the traditional representation of certain groups as ‘terrorist’, in the role of the state in the production of violence and, finally, to social emancipation (Stump and Dixit, 2011). The ontological positioning in which this project is

supported comes from the monist notion of social reality which as put by Patrick Thaddeus Jackson presupposes the dissolution of the barrier between ‘reality’ and the ‘notion’ of reality (2008, p.149), comprising that “all knowledge is ideal-typical” (2008, p.147). As such, there is an intrinsic relation with the study of language, which is seen as the only means one has of thinking about the world and developing common meanings, capable of creating different social realities and narratives, gathered around several networks bounded by causality with their environment (Dixit, 2011). Therefore, knowledge is understood as a “social process constructed through language, discourse and inter-subjective practices” (Jackson, 2007, p.3).

Consequently, the monist ontology translates itself epistemologically as ensuring “that scholarship is less about a presumptive effort to grasp an externally existing world, and more about a disciplined effort to envision what the world would look like if explained and understood according to some ideal-typically elaborated set of value-commitments” (Jackson, n.d., p.658, cited in Stump and Dixit, 2011). This project will, in a simplified shortened manner, apply the monist ontological understandings of CTS to the analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as done by Richard Jackson, in the studying of the “central terms, assumptions, labels, narratives and genealogical roots, and to reflect on the political and normative consequences of the language and knowledge production of ‘Islamic Terrorism’” (2007, p.395).

The values holding this analysis are, thus, intrinsically connected to those of CTS, being strongly concerned with fundamental human rights and security, social justice, equality and surpassing the conventional definitions of security forged around nationhood, entailing the prominence of State’s interest over any other actor (Jackson, 2007).

Therefore, the approach running through this argument is a social constructivist one, where the focal point is that of understanding how “representations of terrorism and their reality are socially produced through linguistic and non-linguistic practices” (Stump and Dixit, 2011, p.210), as such this project is intended to analyse, through the analytical framework of CDA, the way social actors, in this case, politicians in the UK, make use of categories such as ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorists’ to “make sense of and act during unfolding events” (Stump and Dixit, 2011, p. 207) as is the case of the return and particularly, repatriation of the women and children associated with ISIS and British FTFs.

To better outline these dynamics Van Dijk’s distinction between global and local contexts (2001a) was followed in the structuring of this analysis. Firstly, the global context, defined by the “social, political, cultural, and historical structures in which the communicative event takes place” (van Dijk, 2001b, p.108)”, was highlighted in the previous chapter. The following section will set out the analysis of the local context of parliamentary discussions, in an effort to better define the implications between the two.

Research Goals

In the methodological context being applied, which will be developed next, the local context, defined as “properties of the immediate, interactional situation in which the communicative event takes place” (van Dijk, 2001a, p.108) will be characterized as a part of a critical and deeper study of narrative, argumentation and rhetoric focused on unveiling “intentions, goals, knowledge, norms and other beliefs” (van Dijk, 2001a, p.108) embedding the political decision-making process.

In other words, through the characterization of the narratives and arguments surrounding issues of the return and repatriation of the women and children connected to ISIS which are happening at the microlevel of the social interaction in the specific situation of a parliamentary debate, the roots of the formation of public policies and legislation entailing strong consequences at the macrolevel of the global societal establishment will tentatively be outlined.

For the purpose of analysing and comprehending the political narratives and rhetorical means applied in policy discussions regarding the UK’s strategy towards British citizens associated with ISIS the following research questions are introduced.

- Is there a punitive or a comprehensive political argumentative framework regarding the return and repatriation of the women and children linked with ISIS?
- Are British women and children associated with ISIS addressed in parliamentary discussions as firstly victims or international criminals?
- How is the United Kingdom’s own responsibility in the repatriation of British linked women and children, trapped in refugee and displaced people camps’ in Syria addressed in Parliamentary discussions?

For the sake of answering the research questions, four Debates of the British Parliament will be analysed through the framework of CDA. The next sections highlight the Data Collection and Analysis methodology.

Data Collection

Justification and Context

Parliamentary Discourse

Parliamentary debates were chosen as these are one of the core moments for political dialogue and interchange, being crucial to understand in what way and around which narratives the public opinion and social predicaments are brought up and articulated to and with the political realm. Applying CDA' methods to the selected parliamentary debates will allow to deconstruct the political thought process and narrative building through the "rhetorical patterns of parliamentary deliberation" which are reflexive of "various ideological visions, party affiliations, institutional positions, and political agendas of Members of Parliament (MPs) " in the relation with "members of the electorate, the general public, and the media" (Ilie, 2015, p.13). The present analysis pertains, thus, to unveil some parts of the narratives sustaining the decision-making framework surrounding the subject of the return and repatriation of British citizens associated with ISIS mostly women and children, who remain as refugees in Syria and Iraq to the present day.

Believing in the notion that a large part of political activity is discursive, serving both functional and strategic goals of the political process, the parliamentary discourse analysis was chosen as one of many genres that allow for the accomplishment and contextualization of political discourse (van Dijk, 1997). In here, the discourse is only considered political, in the instances of the parliamentary debate which are 'for the record', and thus, when parliamentarians are speaking and acting as accountable contributors for the discussion or decision-making process of the parliamentary session (van Dijk, 1997).

As mentioned before, political discourse analysis can't be separated from the political context in which it takes place, as such, after the first step of elaborating the problematic of FTFs, and the women and children associated with ISIS, the latter being the focus of this analysis, and the associated international and British dynamics and context, the next step is to define the political context per se, which means the institutional structure where these discussions take place, through the following conceptual framework advanced by Teun van Dijk (1997). Through the proposed categorization, both the overall societal domain, the nature of the political system, institutions, actors, and interactions are brought to light in an attempt to define such genre. Such a characterization makes the brief case for the following definition of a parliamentary debate (van Dijk, 1997, p.19), from which the contextual analysis in this and the next chapters will derive:

- The general Domain of the interaction – "Politics"
- The System where the interaction takes place – "Democracy"
- The Institution – "Parliament"
- The Values and Ideologies – "Democracy, group and Party ideologies"
- The Organizations which are part of the interaction – "Political Parties, lobbyists"
- Political Actors – "Members of parliament, cabinet ministers"
- Political Relations – "Legislative Power"

- Political Process – “Legislation”
- Political Action – “Political decision making”
- Political Cognitions – “Attitudes about the relevant issue”

The UK’s institutional context

The political system in place in the UK is characterized as a parliamentary monarchy. The Sovereign – both the king and the queen - are represented as “The Crown” which serve, mostly, a formal role, choosing the Prime Minister and representing the higher authority by which all governmental issues need to be approved. The Parliament encompasses two different parliamentary chambers, the “House of Commons” and the “House of Lords”, located in the Palace of Westminster.

House of Commons

The House of Commons is the key chamber of the UK’s Parliament and the epicentre of political debate, holding most of its legislative power. The 650 members of this House, MPs are publicly elected and parliamentary terms of five years are governed by the designated party. After a General Election, the largest non-government party converts into the Official Opposition which maintains a position of scrutiny and counterpoise towards the elected Cabinet. The five main political parties are the Conservative Party (Con), with 360 representatives, the Labour Party (Lab), integrated by 199 MPs, the Scottish National Party (SNP), having 45 representatives, the Liberal Democrat Party (LD), with twelve affiliates and, finally, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), integrated by eight MPs.

The Government has been led by majority by the Conservative Party since 2010, which was run by three Prime Ministers in office in the timeframe up to 2021, in direct opposition to the Labour Party. The transcripts under scrutiny derive from debates dated between January 2018 and October 2019, mostly comprised in the mandate of Prime Minister Theresa May which was succeeded by Prime Minister Boris Johnson incumbent as of July 2019. All of the debates under examination took place in the House of Commons.

House of Lords

The traditional UK’s Parliament ‘checks and balances’ schematic is accomplished by the second house of Parliament, the *House of Lords*, whose members are protuberant individuals attributed by both the Government and the Official Opposition with life affiliations, exempt from association to any political party.

The role of this chamber has been progressively contested and the term “Parliament” has been increasingly used to reference the “House of Commons” alone, due to the fading of influence of the “House of Lords”.

Body of Analysis

The official transcripts of every Parliamentary Debate are systematised in the Hansard Platform, an edited record of all parliamentary discussions, votes, written ministerial statements and written answers to parliamentary questions for both chambers of Parliament.

According to a computer search using the key words and various combinations of the same words associated with the proposed study, those of, Islamic State (ISIS and DAESH); Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF); Syria; Iraq; Children; Repatriation; Returnees and British Jihad; within the timeframe of the main international momentum for repatriations, established between 2018 and 2020 the British House of Commons did not discuss such topics regularly.

As such, all the debates found within those characteristics, which rose by MP’s will and motions, were selected for the analysis which intends to outline the political narratives and argumentation schemes regarding the return and repatriation of both the British women and children typically associated with FTFs, benefiting from the progression and evolution the four transcripts may provide. The selection of these four debates allows for a more robust intertextual analysis, compromising the differences or similarities in dealing the women and children related with ISIS, in comparison to the traditional FTFs framework, comprehending a deeper understanding of the dynamics under study, and reenforcing the qualitative conclusions that will be withdrawn.

This study focuses on four debates organized chronologically and labelled as Transcript (T) 1, 2, 3 and 4 as follows:

T1. “British Jihadis (Iraq and Syria)” - Volume 635: debated on Wednesday 31st January 2018

T2. “UK Nationals returning from Syria” – Volume 654 : Debated on Monday 18th February 2019

T3. “Shamima Begum and Others” – Volume 656 : Debated on Monday 11th March 2019

T4. “British Children – Syria” – Volume 666 : Debated on Tuesday 22nd October 2019

Combining the proposed elements of analysis with the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, in which CDA strongly relies, differing from other methodologies through the scrutiny of the relationships and patterns between texts (Meyer, 2001) will allow for the beginning of the understanding and unveiling of the prevailing political cognitions regarding responsibility towards the management of the return and repatriation of English citizens, particularly women

and children, connected to ISIS. As such, this examination will try to address the “symbolic economy of language” rooted in the minds of political actors and reflected on their actions through the framework of critical political discourse analysis highlighting the relations between the elements of text and talk and the dimensions of the political context, process and system (van Dijk, 1997, p.44).

The following chapter, regarding *Data Analysis*, will highlight the political actors and actions, as a part of the contextual definition suggested by van Dijk, going beyond the study of structures of text and talk to the study of the relation between context and those structures, the primary elements through which hidden political cognitions can be unveiled (1997). The transcripts under scrutiny are intended to allow to understand the meanings and narratives that establish the political discussions on topics related with the return, repatriation, and trial of the British women and children with ties to ISIS, which are to this day stranded in refugee and displaced people camps.

Framework of Analysis

Political Discourse Analysis Through the Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis

The early scientific work which started in the 1980's founding what is still an ongoing process of defining and implementing Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforward, CDA) established what are still today, the main assumptions and premisses guiding the society of scholars of the field. It was first defined by Norman Fairclough, which understood that the connections between language, power and ideology needed to be systematically studied, through a coherent analytical framework integrating “a) analysis of text, b) analysis of processes of text production and c) sociocultural analysis of the discursive event as a whole” which he entitled CDA (1989, cited in Fairclough, 1995, p.23). CDA recognizes, first and foremost, the role of language in the structuring of power relations in society and the one of ideology in establishing and maintaining such unequal relations (Anthonissen, 2001, cited in Wodak, 2001). As such, language is perceived as a social phenomenon, allowing not only individuals, but also institutions and social groups to establish their own specific meaning and values in a systematic way (Wodak, 2001). When conducting CDA, texts seem to be the most relevant elements of language in communication, having an active impact on readers and/or hearers (Wodak, 2001).

In the words of van Dijk CDA is a “discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” in a continuous effort to “understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality” (2001b, p.353). As such, CDA's tries to explain discourse structures through the analysis of elements of social interactions and structures (van Dijk, 2001b). Therefore, the notion of ‘discourse’ can only be so when it is referring to the overlapping relation

between social interactions and processes and the use of language, which systematically defines them and their variations, performing a dialectical relation with structure, being “shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to reproducing and transforming them” (Fairclough, 1995, p.73). In other words “language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology” (Fairclough, 1995, p.73).

CDA scholars seem to ask different research questions than those using different sociolinguistics approaches, determining from the outset the nature of the problem they are interested in, which tend to be a social or political one (van Dijk, 2001b) playing an advocacy role for marginalised and prejudiced social groups with contributions most times blurring the line between social scientific research and political argumentation (Meyer, 2001). Therefore, problems are addressed critically, in an attempt to unveil power relations that remain concealed, and consequently arrive to conclusions of “practical relevance” (Meyer, 2001, p.15). Arising from this intention, CDA is built on the idea that texts can’t be separated from their context, meaning that there is a clear interest on extralinguistic factors, as are culture, society and ideology and their relationship with language (Meyer, 2001). For this reason, “the concrete instances of social interaction” (Meyer, 2001, p.18) are the focus of such approach, in mediation with “grand social theories as applied to society at large” (Meyer, 2011, p.18).

Being concerned with questions of “power”, “dominance” and “inequality between social groups”, through their connection with “discourse”, “communication”, “language use” and “verbal interaction”, CDA is concerned with “everyday interaction and experience” as the place where the macro and micro levels of society connect and therefore where the connections between the two are built (van Dijk, 2001b, p.354). Furthermore, there are several ways of doing so and arriving at a unified critical analysis (van Dijk, 2001b). The power of a group or institution is assessed through a myriad of resources, however, the most relevant and “symbolic” one seems to be that of “access to or control over” public discourse and communication (van Dijk, 1996, cited in van Dijk 2001b, p.355). Thus, the more prominent social groups and institutions tend to represent different levels of exclusive access to and control over more influential discourse, proportionally, being on the top of access to social power, as is the case of political elites who have control over the public political and policy discourse (van Dijk, 2001b, p.356).

Therefore, the field of the Political Discourse Analysis (henceforward, PDA) is found in the realm of CDA as it is a “critical enterprise” focused on “the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse” (van Dijk, 1997, p.11) being able to address relevant political issues which can also be found in the political science’s realm (van Dijk, 1997). Despite being an underexplored practice in political science, it is an approach that can provide very insightful information given the understanding of political discourse as political

action and a crucial part of the political process, allowing for a deeper and more complete account of political phenomena (van Dijk, 1997).

“The specifics of political discourse analysis therefore should be searched for in the relations between discourse structures and political context structures” (van Dijk, 1997, p.24). Accordingly, if “complex communicative events” define discourse, “access” and “control” can be defined both for “context” and for the “structures of text and talk themselves” (van Dijk, 2001b, p.356). Context is defined as the “mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse” (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; van Dijk, 1998, cited in van Dijk, 2001b, p.356), consisting of categories such as “overall definition of the situation”, “setting (time/place)”, “ongoing actions (including discourse and discourse genres)”, “participants in various communicative, social, or institutional roles” and their “mental representations: goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies” (van Dijk, 2001b, p.356). Hence, PDA focus is on the understanding how language adoptions are manipulated for a given political purpose (Wilson, 2001). Thus, once the contextual political elements are defined, PDA is very similar to CDA, however, the properties of text and talk are only addressed if interconnected with that same context (van Dijk, 1997).

The goals of this analysis are better achieved through Van Dijk’s approach, largely focused on the relation between political contexts and the cognitions identifiable through critical discourse analysis that are intended to maintain unequal power relations and oppressive social systems based on social groups’ systematized categorizations (1997).

The basis of this analysis are the components proposed for political discourse analysis by van Dijk (1997) which will reflect on the following:

- Topics and Semantic Macropropositions: “an Ideological or Political Square, which generally constrains political text and talk and its evaluation: Emphasis/De-Emphasis of Our/Their Good/Bad Actions (van Dijk, 1995, cited in van Dijk, 1997, p.28);
- Superstructures or textual schemata: The distribution and positioning of meanings in the overall discourse structure which in political text and talk are translated into the structures and strategies of argumentation (van Dijk, 1997);
- Local semantics: The meanings reflected on the analysis will replicate and relate to the overall political context. “The semantic participants and predicates in local propositions tend to be reflexive in political text and talk” (van Dijk, 1997, p.30);
- Lexicon: The meanings of the words utilized;
- Syntax: The subtle manipulation of the syntactic style being employed by politicians;
- Rhetoric: Optional rhetorical operations reflecting persuasive purposes.

Chapter III : Data Analysis

In this chapter the Data Analysis will be set forward. Gathering both contextual elements, as is the case of the political actors, and the critical analysis of text and talk, as proposed by Van Dijk (1997), each transcript will be scrutinised in an attempt to unveil some of the political cognitions guiding policy making regarding the return and repatriation of women and children associated with ISIS and British FTFs.

T1. British Jihadis (Syria and Iraq)

The first selected House of Commons' debate took place on the 31st of January of 2018, a prime moment of concern with counter-terrorism measures in the UK due to the raise in numbers of British returnees from Syria and Iraq, Islamic State's territories, around 425 British citizens, the largest cohort in Europe.

This debate was called by the Official Labour opposition, however, participants are mainly MPs aligned with the Conservative Party. To this debate contributed the following seven MPs, John Woodcock (Lab), Jim Shannon (DUP), Jack Lopresti (Con), Anneliese Dodds (Lab), Alex Chalk (Con), Mr Bob Seely (Con) and Victoria Atkins (Con). The more prominent and lengthy interventions are those of John Woodcock, which at the time of the debate was an MP for the Labour Party, from which he resigned in April 2018, becoming an Independent (Ind) in 2019. In the same year he was nominated by Boris Johnson for a lifetime peerage in the House of Lords, due to his endorsement of the Conservatives in the 2019 Elections, becoming Baron Walney, sitting on the crossbench ever since. The ones of Mr Bob Seely, member of the Conservative Party since 2017 and Victoria Atkins, a Conservative since 2015 and the Home Office's Parliamentary Under-Secretary between November 2017 and September 2021 and the Minister for Women, from January 2018 to February 2020, posts she was holding at the time of the debate. Since then she took office in the Ministry of Justice, in September 2021, as Minister of State and Minister for the Afghan Resettlement. On the present debate Victoria Atkins was speaking on behalf of the Minister for Security and Economic Crime, Ben Wallace.

Two main topics are discussed, the legal framework and tools available to the Government to deal with "extremism" (Woodcock, p.1) and citizens who have travelled to ISIS' territories which were returning to the country and, the UK' own responsibility towards these individuals. The next sections will highlight the main arguments and propositions composing the textual schematic of the debate, as well as the main rhetorical and lexicon choices applied by MPs in the discussion of said topics.

The debate was called by the Official Labour opposition to Government, through a question posed by John Woodcock, arguing for the inefficiency of the legal framework and tools available

to counter “the evil of militant, expansionist, Islamist extremism” (p.1), which he states, “a threat that would destroy our life and everything we stand for” (p.1). Contestant of government action. Arguing the return of more than half of “UK-linked individuals” (p.1), and the lack of transparency of the Government regarding the processing of those individuals through the court system, showing concern regarding “These man and women are escaping justice, despite having been prepared to fight British troops in the name of a sickeningly evil cause. If they are not locked up or deradicalized, they are potentially able to import back to British streets brutal killing techniques learned on the battlefield” (p.2).

Referencing a study from the Institute for Global Change highlighting the interconnections between travelling to jihad conflict zones and radicalisation, and the lack of updates on the number of convictions “fuelling the suspicion that in fact only a fraction of returnees are being charged because it is often too difficult to amass sufficient evidence that is admissible in an open court” (p.3) the MP builds the case for the most prominent and politically charged moment of the debate. His proposal of a British jihad travel ban, which similarly to Australia’s counter terrorism measures, making it “an offence to travel without a verifiable legitimate reason to certain designated terror hotspots” (p.3). Accordingly, the “burden” (p.4) of proofing one’s lack of involvement with ISIS would be placed on the traveller, and those not able to do it, would directly be prosecuted. In the eyes of the MP “the fact of their going is proof enough that they are supporters of terror”(p.4). Using the allegiance of the United Kingdom and Australia has an extra reason for the consideration of Government of such proposal given it would offer them “a better change of ensuring these people face the consequences of their actions if they survive their experience to return to the UK” (p.4).

The opening statement of this debate shows the strategies entailed to build an out group towards these citizens, comprising rhetorical and lexical choices that mean to address, from the beginning of the discussion the negative depictions of citizens, immediately posing them as a threat to the national state and respective values. This forges the ideological square of the discussion, a traditional political approach, firstly addressed by Van Dijk (1997), comprising discursive practices employed to create distinctions amongst different social groups through the appraisal of the ‘in’ group and the diminishing of ‘out’ groups (1997). Using the expression “UK-linked individuals” the MP intends to stray people away of the immediate right to be considered as British citizens, pretending to build the notion of othering regarding these people, who are, as described in the first section, rightful British citizens, and leave open the window for Government action towards the dissipation of these same links. Referring to “these man and women escaping justice (...) the MP disregards any differences between the roles played out in the Caliphate by the different groups, asserting that the only way to address such citizens is to prosecute and convict them.

The proposition gathered immediate support on the Conservative side, with MP Alex Chalk, justifying that in order to “uphold our way of life” (p.4) prosecutions can only be followed when there is evidence that can be trialled in court towards a conviction. Recognizing the difficulty of gathering evidence of the actions of FTFs in ISIS’ territory he agrees that such ban would make it possible to directly prosecute such citizens given that “under the current system”, applying the rule of law, “people who were probably doing something will get away with it” (p.6).

One of the most used arguments towards the MPs inquiry on the low prosecution numbers by Government is the difficulty to gather evidence on the activities and roles carried out on site. As such, the proposition of the travel ban, seems to gather a lot of support from MPs who find that prosecution or deprivation of citizenship must be the prominent approach to FTFs, with women being regarded as such, strengthening the ability of State’s conviction on the very grounds of travelling to this territories.

Anneliese Dodds (Lab) raises the issue of citizens being held in Kurdish prisons, awaiting sentencing, for whom “the British Government do not seem willing to take any responsibility for” (p.3). Later in the debate she reformulates the question posing that “the British Government in some situations do not appear to be willing to do what many other countries have done, which is to repatriate those who are, for example, in Kurdish-run jails in Kurdish-run areas of Syria and require those people to stand trial?” (p.7). In response to this, Victoria Atkins enforces the argument of national security being “very much at the forefront” and directs this issue to be answered by writing by the Minister, dismissing the subject for the rest of the debate.

During the entire debate, responsibility towards stranded citizens is diverged by Government representatives under the argument of the paramount responsibility to ensure national security.

Bob Seely (Con) takes on such the previous interventions, to add a statement about the difficulties of the military and security and defence personnel, when dealing with “British Jihadis” (p.4). He argues that Government action, although praised, “have been somewhat hidebound by human rights and policing legislation and laws from earlier Governments that make military action in some foreign states extremely difficult. The reality is that it is easier to kill a British jihadi in that state, rather than to arrest, turn or rehabilitate them. I do not mean that in either a positive or negative way; merely it is a statement of fact” (p.5). The detention pathways guided by the rule of law, according with the international system in which British law is integrated can be an obstacle to these convictions once it entails “respect” to the “detainee’s human rights, whether people think they should be respected or not” (p.5) arguing that such laws “do not always take into account local circumstance, failed states or fragile states and are perhaps more evidence of the proof of unintended consequences” (p.5).

In her first speaking moment of the debate, MP Victoria Atkins, the only Government's representative in the conversation, highlights the two main arguments justifying government's action "The safety and security of our country, our people and our communities remains the Government's No.1 priority. Regretfully (...) have seen the tragic impact of terrorist who seek to use violence to undermine and destroy our society's commitment to liberal values. Of course they're cowardly actions serve only to strengthen our resolve and our determination to protect the United Kingdom and to disrupt those who engage in terrorism" (p.6). Secondly, she enforces that "we have been clear over the past years that people should not travel to Syria and parts of Iraq" and everyone who does so is under "justifiable suspicion" and "a legitimate target while in the conflict zone" (p.6). The Government's approach is again, the ideological square, positively representing the UK and representing FTFs as cowards who intend to disrupt their values, justifying every punitive approach needed to ensure national security.

She then follows to inform that "a significant proportion of those who have already returned are assessed as no longer being of national security concern" (p.6), she assures however, responding to concerns of lack of prosecution, that "anybody who does return will be investigated by the police to determine whether they have committed criminal offences or pose a risk to national security", and "should be brought to justice, either in the UK or in the region" (p.7). Regarding the difficulty of gathering evidence that holds in a court of law she proceeds to the enumeration of the tools the Government as resorted to when prosecution, and conviction, is not possible as are the royal prerogative of cancellation of British passports "when they are at risk of being misused" (p.8), deprivation of British citizenship "where satisfied that doing so is conducive to the public good" however, only, "if the person would not be left stateless as a result (...) in line with our commitments under international law, as a signatory of the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness. We can remove passports where someone is of dual citizenship but we have to abide by the law when it comes to citizens who have only a British passport" (p.8). Other preferential measures seem to focus around temporary exclusion orders, preventing the return to the UK of suspects of terrorist involvement, excepting those who do so under strict in-country measures.

The Labour proposal for a British Jihad ban seems to already have been discussed by the Security Minister with its Australian counterpart, as of 2017, finding itself "under review" for the "usefulness" in the British context.

FTFs are referred to as "UK-linked individuals of national security concern", "these people", "individuals", "returnees", "supporters of terror", showing that there is no distinction made between the roles or the participations levels of such citizens, regarding them as "vital" threats, despite lack of proof of participation in hostilities showing that a punitive framework stood in place by Government, alluding obligation to national security first, rather to stranded British

citizens, focusing on the insufficiency of the tools available to the conviction of those who “manage” to return, evading every hint of governmental obligations towards the repatriation of FTFs, with no distinction between the set international frameworks addressed in the first section.

T2. UK Nationals returning from Syria

The second debate selected took place almost a year after the first one, on the 18th of February 2019 and focused on the evolution of the measures applied and approved while the number of returnees progressed and the country was faced with the mediatic case of Shamima Begum, which mobilized and pressured both the public and the political actors into a renewed dialogue reflecting the dynamics of the repatriation of British women and children associated with ISIS.

The debate was originated by an Urgent Question advanced by Dr Mathew Offord, a member of the Conservatives since 2010 and revolves around the confrontation of the MPs with Sajid Javid, which was the Secretary of State for the Home Department from the 30th of April 2018 to 24th of July 2019, being appointed Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in June 2021.

Out of the five selected debates the present one rendered the largest number of intervening MPs counting with thirty-five representatives, from which twenty four are from the Conservative Party, six are from the Labour Party, two integrate the Scottish National Party (SNP), one is affiliated with the Liberal Democrat Party (LD), one is from the DUP and the last one is an Independent member.

Opening the debate, Sajid Javid, declares that “whatever role they took in the so-called caliphate” British citizens who had links with ISIS “supported a terrorist organization and, in doing so, have shown that they hate our country and the values we stand for”, regarding the group as “dead cult” proceeding with depictions of the groups’ military action. With numbers of returns growing he asserts “when I can, and where any threat remains I will not hesitate to prevent that”. (p.1). The tools available to Government to deal with are, once more, highlighted, with the deprivation of British citizenship to “dangerous dual citizens” (p.1) which at the time of the debate had happened in “more than 100” (p.1) cases, and prevention and investigative measures (TPIMs) applied to those who are allowed back under strict in-country measures. Praising the Royal Assent of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act of 2019, he upraises the monitoring of returnees by the country’s “world class police” (p.1), asserting that if “someone backs terror, there must be consequences”.

Continuing the punitive tradition regarding FTFs, these time addressing the possibility of different roles in the Caliphate, Government position shifts, against international law, towards the

impediment of return. Deprivation of citizenship and temporary exclusion measures are highlighted as prime tools to prevent the return of British citizens who travelled to join ISIS.

The case of Shamima Begum, a British citizen, born and raised in the UK, is firstly brought up by Dr Mathew Offord, concerned with the imposition, under international law, of allowing her return and a fair trial in the UK. Throughout all the debate, mentions to this particular case are answered by the Home Secretary with “ I am not at liberty to discuss the case of any particular individual. (...) however, we have all seen and heard the remarks that she made in the media, and we can all draw our own conclusions”. The answer is then directed to assurance that all returning individuals are questioned, investigated and prosecuted when “there is enough evidence” (p.3) and the returns are managed through the tools enunciated thus far.

For the first time, children are included in the discussion with the Home Secretary declaring that Government “will work with authorities, particularly if young children are involved, to make sure that they get the mental health, psychiatric and other types of help that may be necessary” and “work towards building more cohesive communities and winning the understanding of all communities, and that is something we always try to do”(p.3), however he asserts “If we deem someone to be a serious threat to this country and it is in the public interest to prevent them from re-entering the UK and we can do so by legal means by depriving them of citizenship, or preventing entry in the case of a non-British national, we would always look to do that” (p.4). However addressing children and the grievances they might be exposed to, not directly referring to them as FTFs, national security concerns and guarantee seems to prevail.

Sir Michael Fallon raises the necessity of a new international system, on how to deal with the cases being discussed, even suggesting an “international court” making sure “they are properly prosecuted” and do not end up in “a new Guantanamo” (p.4). Sajid Javid argues that most of countries allied to the UK are facing the “issue of foreign fighters” and that the Government is “working closely with them to see if we can do to ensure that in every case justice is done, and, where possible, is done in the region”(p.4).

The concern is shared by his counterpart Mr Andrew Mitchell asserting the importance of not letting “these people (...)stateless in ungoverned spaces, floating around or consorting with those of ill intention”. Confronting the Home Secretary he argues for the “courts and judicial structures, the rule of law and the security institutions of the state” and the Government’s obligation of taking “responsibility for dealing with these people, and that we cannot just close our eyes and pull up the drawbridge?” (p.5).

A representative of the SNP, Gavin Newlands, following the assertion of Government’s responsibility towards national citizens who left to join ISIS, being “obligated under international law to allow re-entry to UK citizens without claim to another nationality (...), to return and face

the consequences” of their actions (p.5). Adding, referencing the case of Shamima Begum “She is a vulnerable young woman with a newborn child (...), whatever her degree of culpability, was a child when she left the UK, and is thought to have been a victim of a grooming campaign, like many other UK children at the time” (p.5). In his understanding “by showing our commitment to the rule of law, we demonstrate the strength of the democratic system and help to prevent others from being radicalised” (p.5).

Sajid Javid defends the irresponsibility of the State arguing that “if individuals have left Britain” to join ISIS “we can understand why they are considered a threat to individuals and to our values in this country, and to our allies across the world. Those individuals have made that decision, and the Government’s first priority is to protect this country and do whatever is necessary”(p.5) addressing each case on a “case-by-case basis”(p.6).

Dr Julian Lewis (Con) takes on the opportunity to address the inability of the current legal system to convict FTFs, quoting an article, by Professor Richard Ekins of Oxford University, in order to, equally, secure that one solution for this would be to “restore the law of treason, specifying that it is treason to support a group that one knows intends to attack the UK or is fighting UK forces” (p.6), which is positively perceived by the Home Secretary asserting the Government’s commitment to “ensuring that we have the right laws in place”(p.7). Addressing yet again, the difficulty of gathering evidence to make a case in British legal standards, “when someone has gone to a completely ungoverned space where we have no consular presence and no diplomatic relations of any type, and nor do our allies” (p.7), Sajid Javid, asserts that the driving factor behind the decision of letting national citizens who travelled to such areas return to the UK “should be what is best for the security and the national interest” (p.7) and that the priority will be “to see whether justice can be done in the region” (p.8). In a clear violation of against the international standards, entailing states’ responsibility to provide their citizens with a fair trial, addressed in the first section.

The issue of the children born to British citizens stranded in the territories is advanced by Thangam Debbonaire (Lab), in the form of the questioning of the Government, regarding the rights of the child of Shamima Begum, “a British citizen” (p.8) , to be recovered, protected and brought back.

The following excerpt defines, in a clear manner, the positioning of Government towards these children, *“As a father, I think that any parent would have sympathy for a completely innocent child who is born into a battle zone or even taken there by their parents. But ultimately, we must remember that it is their parents who have decided to take that risk with their child; it is not something that Britain or the British Government have done. They have deliberately taken their child into a warzone where there is no British consular protection, and there is FCO advice*

that no one should go there. Furthermore, if that person is involved with a terrorist organisation, they have gone to either directly or indirectly kill other people's children, and we should keep that in mind. Lastly, if we were to do more to try to rescue these children, we have to think about what risk that places on future children in the United Kingdom and the risk that they may be taken out to warzones by their parents” (p.8).

Repatriation is firstly brought up by Anneliese Dodds (Lab), arguing that Government was “totally absolving themselves of any responsibility”(p.10), having the obligation to take these citizens back to the UK to face justice. The Home Secretary answer reflects, almost instantly, the punitive cognitions behind Government action, enforcing that travelling to Syria is unadvised to any British citizen and, “if the individual concerned is a foreign fighter who went to join a terrorist organization to kill, rape and cause enormous damage, there is no way that this Government will risk the lives of British personnel (...) to go and rescue such person. No way” (p.10), “(...) they were full of hate for our country and hate for our values. They went out there to murder, to rape, to support rape, and to commit many violent and vile acts. We can absolutely imagine why hardly anyone among the British public would have any sympathy for them”(p.12). Moreover, even when justice can't be done in the region, the Government will still “look to work with our allies on other means” (p.13). The negative depictions of the group are supposed to justify the lack of action or responsibility towards repatriating said individuals, while at the same time, the public is used as a vessel to argue for negative other presentation.

However, when addressing the measures taken towards those who “manage to return”, despite enforcing the measures destined to all citizens, he adds “Where youngsters, in particular, are involved, however, we also make sure they get deradicalisation help through specific programmes; in some cases, through mental health support; and through support in other ways too. In each case, we will work with partners to create a bespoke programme for that individual and do all we can” (p.15), reflecting a more comprehensive approach extended to minors.

The closing remarks of the debate are provided by another member of the Conservative party, Stephen Metcalfe “I, and the constituents who have contacted me, find it hard to understand how someone who has joined an organisation whose aims are to destroy the values that we hold dear can then cite those same values in an attempt to justify being repatriated to the United Kingdom (p.16) to which the Home Secretary ensures “I think that they are the sentiments of the vast majority of the constituents whom we are all here to represent. We must indeed use all the legal means that we have to ensure that those who have supported terror groups, either at home or abroad, are always punished for that, and are brought to justice” (p.16).

Such statement argues for the punitive framework to be addressed towards every individual on the grounds of ISIS territory, showing that despite efforts from some MPs, the vast

majority of representatives chose to ignore the different frameworks addressed in the first section, rather appealing for the strengthening of the strict punitive legal framework in place in the UK, and further means for swift prosecutions.

T3. Shamima Begum and Others

The present debate took place on the 11th of March 2019, in the wake of the news of the death of Jarrah, the three-week old son of Shamima Begum, in the Syrian Refugee camp the two were stranded.

The debate arose from an Urgent Question posed by Ms Dianne Abbot, who joined the Labour Party in 1987, focused on the questioning of Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary, about the case of Shamima, the death of her son and other similar cases, regarding British citizens, mostly women and children who are still, to this day, stranded in refugees and displaced people's camps in Northeast Syria. To this debate contributed twenty-four House of Commons' representatives, thirteen Conservatives, four Labour Party's representatives, three members of the SNP, one Liberal Democrat, one member of the DUP and an Independent member in discussion with Sajid Javid who, at the moment, was still the Home Secretary.

Similarly to T2, no particular case is directly commented by the Home Secretary. He starts his comments with an intervention that summarizes the Government approach to such cases where "Some irresponsibly took young British children with them, and some had children while they were there as part of their mission to expand the so-called caliphate" (p.1) , eluding the House, "We have made it very clear since 2011 that no British citizen should travel to Syria. Those who have stayed until the bitter end include some of the most devoted supporters of Daesh" (p.1). Remembering the tool of citizenship deprivation, to those who are entitled to another citizenship as a possible solution, which had been "applied to about 150 people" since 2010 he argues that such decisions : "are made very carefully (...) based on advice and intelligence from the security services, counter-terrorism police, and specialist security and legal officials in the Home Office. When people dedicated to keeping our country safe give an informed recommendation, any Home Secretary should listen (...)" (p.1). As such, responsibility is totally transferred towards individuals who travelled against UK authorities' advice, praising their work and the values of the country, depicting individuals remaining in the area as the group's stronger supporters, and subsequently, representing the largest threat to the people in the UK.

The approach being taken towards British citizens stranded in Syria is justified under the Government's inability to "provide support to British nationals within Syria as the UK Government do not have a consular presence there" , establishing, however, that "status of a child does not change if their parents' British citizenship is subsequently revoked" (p.1). He then asserts

“This Government remain committed to protecting our citizens around the world, but I will not shy away from using the powers at my disposal to protect this country” (p.1). Even though there seems to be a much more lenient approach towards children, that is immediately deconstructed under the need to protect the country.

Dianne Abbot (Lab) argues for Britain’s responsibility towards women and children stranded in camps, using the example of Shamima Begum which was born and raised in the UK and left to join ISIS at the age of 15, as would be her offspring. Highlighting the spree of citizenship revocation for women associated with ISIS under the Home Secretary’s predecessor causing “widespread concern and alarm” (p.2), declaring that even though MPs “understand the issue of keeping British people (...) this was a British baby, who is now dead” (p.2), affirming that Government also has a responsibility towards being fair and appearing fair to the eyes of the British population which, according to the MP did not “appear just or fair to the majority of the British public”.

Referring the Government commitment to the protection of British citizens, the Home Secretary regards it to be “very different” in instances of war territories where the UK has no consular presence and as such “whether a child or an adult (...) there is no way for authorities – as much as someone might want to, especially in the case of a child – to provide any type of assistance”. In his words, the problem with these children is not much a matter of citizenship, given that “I can confirm that if a child is born to a British citizen anywhere in the world, as long as that British citizen is not a naturalised British citizen, that child is British, even if the parent’s British citizenship is subsequently removed” (p.7), but rather of Governments capability to help, nevertheless, he argues “The death of any British child, even one born to a foreign terrorist fighter, is of course a tragedy, but the only person responsible for the death of that child is the foreign terrorist fighter”. The apparent sympathy towards the death of the child seems to fall short once the blame is directly addressed to the mother, referred to as a FTF, completely disregarding the protection that States must render to all citizens, which must be applied extraterritorially.

On the revocation of citizenship, the Home Secretary declares publicly that no decision to strip someone of their British citizenship is taken without expert advice that that individual would not be rendered stateless. However, “the primary objective should be the safety and security of all those who live in the UK”. Regarding women associated with ISIS Sajid Javid asks “I would gently urge is that no one should make a judgment on the threat that a foreign terrorist fighter poses to our national security based on their gender. That would be entirely wrong. It has been well documented that female terrorist fighters who have gone to join Daesh have engaged in murder, recruitment and radicalisation, including of British citizens through online means. They have assisted in rape and helped to keep sex slaves, and they have also prepared suicide vests and carried out suicide attacks themselves” (p.6). His statement shows that despite a more

comprehensive approach being extended to children, the same does not always apply to women, who are regarded as FTF and possible threats.

Mr Andrew Mitchell questions the wrongfulness of Government action, fully committed to the rule of law and governance structures, leaving women and children in ungoverned spaces subject to further exposure to “terrorists and their recruiters” (p.6). The Home Secretary asserts compliance with international law regarding citizenship deprivation and assures that “where a child is involved, the interests of that child are taken into account” (p.7). Nevertheless, the most prominent argument remains that of the tools available to Government to prosecute returning foreign fighters and their constant review to strengthen them, agreeing with a fellow MP, suggesting “it is time to look at the laws on treason, and to modernise them” (p.7), however each case is supposedly addressed on a “case-by-case basis” and the “best interests of defending our national security” (p.8) will be paramount.

A MP from the Conservative Party, Stephen Crabb, argues for the importance of the understanding of the deeper reasons behind the decision taken by such British citizens, understanding that it is urgent to “build trust in those communities and invest in them so that more young people feel that they have a greater stake in a liberal and free society such as ours?” (p.8). On that note, Sajid Javid declares that “Much work has been done when the UK has suffered some terrible terrorist attacks, and the Government have been required to consider sensibly what more can be done to help us to understand what motivates individuals either to commit acts of terrorism here or to go and join foreign groups abroad” (p.8) and that “many members of the British Muslim community do not want foreign terrorist fighters to return to this country, because they fear both the precedent that that will set for future potential foreign fighters and the radicalism of vulnerable young British Muslims by those returning foreign fighters” (p.8).

A Labour Member argues for the presence of aid agencies in the camps where women and children are stranded, asserting the Governments’ obligations towards identifying British children and women needing support. Remembering that “surely standing up and speaking out for them represents the best of the British values that we want to uphold” (p.10). To such declaration the Home Secretary deepens the argument of the duty towards British citizens living in the UK preventing “further loss of innocent life, including of children in Britain” (p.13) remembering that “it is not possible for our officials, without risk to their own lives and their own safety, to enter Syria. To do so would be to provide that consular presence, which cannot happen” (p.14). In his closing argument Sajid Javid asserts that “This whole power of citizenship deprivation has been set by this Parliament—by parliamentarians—and it has been given to Home Secretaries to use in cases where there is good reason to do so. Ultimately, the purpose of the power is to protect our country” (p.15). The obligation to provide consular support to citizens under grave violations of human rights, as are women and children stranded in refugee camps is

dismissed as impossible due to the risking of British officials, reflecting a larger value directed towards the life of citizens in Britain and English citizens across the world.

T4. British Children: Syria

The last of the five selected House of Commons' debates took place on the 22nd of October 2019, instigated by an Urgent Question posed by Mr David Davis, a Conservative since 1987, about the Government's policy towards British children trapped in Northeast Syria.

Out of the five this debate gathered the second largest number of participants, with the intervention of twenty-five MPs, nine Conservatives, six members of the Labour Party, four representatives of the SNP, three Liberal Democrats, one member of the DUP, and an Independent member in confrontation with Dr Andrew Murrison, a Conservative since 2001 and the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development from 9 May 2019 to 13 February 2020.

Establishing from the beginning that the number of British citizens, including children, stranded on Syrian soil is unattainable due to the conditions on the ground, the Minister declares, from the beginning that the "dreadful situation" of "innocent minors" that are "without doubt, vulnerable (...)" asserting that all cases must be dealt with "care" and "compassion" (p.1). Remembering that "the safety and security of British nationals is a priority for the Foreign Office, although UK travel advice has consistently advised against all travel to Syria since 2011. (...)" Although, the UK has no consular presence in Syria from which to provide assistance, we will do all we can (...) to facilitate the return of unaccompanied or orphan children where feasible. Each case is considered on an individual basis" (p.1). Throughout the whole debate, the confirmation that the focus and priority must be merely on this group of children is regular when answering all MP's comments and concerns, however it entails that children must be addressed as victims first, even if argumentatively. The argument of the "fast-moving" nature of the conflict and the difficulty of "getting access to camps and people" (p.2) is also severely employed.

Mr Davis (Con) makes the case that "the children who have not been orphaned still deserve the UK's protection" given they are "suffering from terrible physical and psychological damage" once they were at "no fault of their own (...) born of parents who made a grotesquely misguided and irresponsible decision to go to Syria" and "(...) should not be punished for their parents' mistakes" (p.1). Addressing the repatriation spree initiated during the 2019 ceasefire by some of the UK's international allies, he argues that not doing the same is "abandoning our moral obligations and risking those vulnerable children growing up in a war-torn area and perhaps turning into terrorists themselves" (p.2). To this framing contributes also Crispin Blunt (Con), who had travelled to the al- Hawl camp, where the parliamentary group he was travelling with

was told that 16 British families were living on the grounds, asserting “every single day we delay in bringing these children home is an extra day of trauma that we are going to have to address at great expense in the United Kingdom. We must take up our responsibilities both to the children and to ourselves in order to protect our future security” (p.5). For the first time, all MPs seem to agree on the urgency to address the situation of children, nevertheless, disregarding their mothers and excluding them of the lenient approach and State’s responsibilities.

This case is supported by Emily Thornberry (Lab), shadow Secretary of State, that declares “(...) that is not who we are as a country or as a people. (...) We have a moral and civic duty to ensure that these British children are brought back to the UK to receive the shelter, care and counselling they need, even if that necessitates bringing back their mothers to face justice in our courts and for the crimes they may have committed” (p.2). This is the first time, repatriation of children accompanied by their mother is reflected upon political debate. The Minister disregards the declaration arguing that the “very difficult area (...) of the legal position of minors who are living in camps with their parents” pointing out “I’m sure that she would not want to trespass to far in that regard, nor would she want to remove children from their parents” (p.3), questioning “the legality of separation of family members” (p.3) completely dismissing the possibility of addressing a framework that would allow the return of both the children and their mothers or prime caregivers. When questioned whether willing to work with agencies, such as UNICEF, by a member of the conservative party, the Minister prefers not to comment on which partners are being mobilized due to the security of British civil servants.

When addressing the ceasefire, the Minister reinforces the unpredictability of the situation in Syria, declaring “if that ceasefire does hold (...) into the future, the situation becomes much more permissive in terms of trying to deliver assistance where it is necessary and also in dealing (...) particularly the orphaned children – unaccompanied minors – who are deeply vulnerable” (p.5), despite it “our work on repatriating the priority cases in particular (...), will continue nevertheless” (p.9). On this subject, Mrs Maria Miller (Con), asserts “these British children are vulnerable and innocent minors, but that is the case whether they are orphaned or not”, making the case for the obligation of the identification of all British children on site, proclaiming “our duty to them really should be clear” (p.9), being backed up by Mrs Madeleine Moon (Con). Dr Murrison guarantees that despite the difficulties in the assessment of the exact number of children and their families on site, “we want to assist all vulnerable children” (p.9).

An Independent MP, Alistair Burt, makes the case on the mothers of such children, arguing the Governments’ obligation to “recognise an international responsibility to take back even those who have been indoctrinated and radicalised in order to protect the children (...)” and “have the resources to be able to deal with them, as well as to protect the children, who are the only innocents, by and large, in this situation” (p.6). The Minister reinforces the “case-by-case”

(p.7) approach when dealing with these children , and defends it on the basis of that “in general, of course, it is absolutely right that a child should not be separated from its mother in particular. That is a strong principle that we should adhere to, but as I say, this situation is rapidly evolving and we have to consider each case individually” (p.7). On his final declarations he adds “It is important to ensure that children in this country and anywhere else remain in the care of their parents wherever possible. As a parent, I can say that it is vital that children remain in a family setting. That is what we will seek to ensure. The state abrogating responsibility for children is an extreme measure, and we will seek to keep families together wherever we can” (p.12).

A MP aligned with the Labour Party, puts directly “(...) is not the solution to repatriate all UK citizens and, in any are guilty or suspected of committing offences, to put them on trial?” (p.8). Dr Murrison justifies Government action under compatibility with the approaches of UK’s international partners, which appear to be acting in the same way, under the argument of its duty “to protect the public” being “at the forefront of our mind”, whereas repatriation makes it “more difficult to mount successful prosecutions and thus protect the public” (p.9). On where the judicial process should take place he declares “our firm view is that any alleged crimes should be tried close to the scene (...)” of said crimes (p.9).

A concerned MP, Chuka Umunna (LD), questions the Minister on the support network available to children in the case they are repatriated, agreeing with fellow MPs concerned with the trauma imposed to these children who have “witnessed, seen and experiencing things, that no adult, never mind any child, should have to experience” and “are likely to be suffering from quite severe psychological and physical conditions” (p.8). The Minister agrees on the “vitality”(p.8) of safeguarding these children, remembering local services’ responsibility to deal with vulnerable children, which should remain the case. However, “the process will be ongoing and very lengthy” (p.8). Her concerns are shared by Tim Loughton (Con) who makes the case for the “duty of care” owed to these children, showing concern with the raise in numbers of children under threat of in-family radicalisation, ensuring that if repatriation is possible “we should work to find them safe homes in the UK, whatever the status of their parents” (p.10). Another MP, Mr Jim Cunningham (Lab), shows concerns on the, already existing, pressure on children’s services in the UK, wondering whether those will be capable of handling another framework of vulnerability, with very specific needs.

The Minister asserts that, regarding social placement, the same procedures applied to children in Britain, should also be applied to this framework, assuring that the identification of the families on site and the assessment of the support that can be provided is underway. He reminds the House, however, “we are talking about a relatively small number of people. This should be a containable piece of work (...)” (p.11). On the care services that will be provided he assures access to the “specialist services they need to ensure their welfare and rehabilitation”

(p.12), looking at “each case individually” ensuring that the Government “apply our moral duty to do what we can for innocent British nationals” (p.12).

Conclusion

The comparison of the four debates allows for some conclusions to be withdrawn regarding political cognitions on the British women and children associated with ISIS. First however it is worth noting that the assessment of political cognitions retrieved from Parliamentary debates has some limitations, the primary ones being those of the qualitative assessment regarding the understanding of the political narratives under through the lenses of the student’s own cognitions. Furthermore, as parliamentary debates are recorded and MPs are aware of such, their interventions are pre-thought and written mitigating some of the deeper cognitions that may be behind the arguments and narratives being advanced.

On the political narratives regarding women and children associated with ISIS it seems that the prevailing narrative is a punitive one, with most political efforts addressed to the strengthening of prosecution tools and measures, strongly centred around revocation of citizenship and temporary exclusion measures, intended to keep their own citizens out of the country. Moreover, in the first two debates it even seems that most political actors, from both the Conservative and the Labour Party do not discern accompanying women from the FTFs directly linked to hostilities. The more lenient approach and the case for the repatriation of all children, the only group which tends to be regarded as maintaining the right of unquestioned British citizenship, being regarded as victims of, particularly, their mothers’ actions is comprised in the third and fourth debates, being raised primarily by Labour representatives, making the case for repatriation schemes capable of addressing all children stranded in camps, even those who are still accompanied by their mothers or prime caregivers.

The ‘ideological square’, a concept developed by Teun van Dijk in his analysis of discourse and racism, which comprises discursive practices employed to create distinctions amongst different social groups through the appraisal of the ‘in’ group and the diminishing of ‘out’ groups (1997), is the prime model applied by British politicians to create a sense of ‘othering’ regarding British FTFs and the women and children related with ISIS which, by definition of citizenship, are harboured under the British system. On the same note, other strategies recognized by the author in his large body of studies on Parliamentary debates were identified in the argumentation strategies presented in the previous chapter. Those are, Positive self- presentation, regarding strong nationalist views and upholding the national values and security above all other responsibilities, negative other presentation, with several depictions entailed to vilify both FTFs and the women who are traditionally linked with them, the apparent sympathy regarding children situations, preceding then to elaborate the various reasons why it is

impossible for the State to act on it, Top down transfer, with many MPs using the public and constituents' concerns as a motive for certain argumentation schemes and the justification of State's policy through the depiction of issues individuals put themselves at.

As The "Other's" narrative, disseminated in the United Kingdom through governmentally distributed constructs of identity which are accepted by the general population as a "social reality" regarding groups such as migrants and refugees used to legitimate different treatments for such groups from those conferred to citizens recognized as such by the State (Bhabha, 1994, p.101, cited in Taha, 2019) is also applied to the case of both FTFs and associated women. However, the victim-first approach seems to be outlined in the narratives and political argumentations put forward regarding children. Nevertheless, that same approach does not seem strong enough for repatriation efforts to take on a central role in discussions or policy, with Government reinforcing several times the paramount responsibility towards national security and the safety of the populations residing in the UK, dismissing any responsibility towards repatriation of women, who are regarded as responsible for the situations they are in.

From the study set forward it is possible to conclude that despite international pressures for the repatriation and fair trial of national FTFs and the women and children associated, the repatriation efforts in the United Kingdom are likely to remain ad hoc, without any regularised framework which can be explained by the punitive narrative being built towards both the traditional FTF setting and the women accompanying, not leaving any space for a more comprehensive approach to be push forward. A stronger case for the repatriation of minors is put advanced by political actors from both the Conservative and the Labour Party, strongly implying State's responsibility towards their repatriation. Even though Government action and narrative seem stuck on the strict measures to apply to returning FTFs, dismissing any responsibility or hypothesis of starting a coherent repatriation scheme allowing every child and their respective caregivers to come back to national soil, despite the several international commitments and civil society mobilization in that sense, some leniency is extended to orphaned and accompanied children, which are typically addressed as the most vulnerable group. Nevertheless, as the literature has showed it is more likely that all orphaned and accompanied children have already been repatriated, leaving the question of whether the approach to the mother's repatriation will shift in order to allow that all children have their best interests fulfilled.

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