

Citizenship is not a commodity

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The Guardian is amongst the entire media in reporting Sajid Javid's attempt to deny Shamima Begum her British citizenship, saying:

Bangladesh has rejected the British government's demand that the Isis runaway Shamima Begum go there instead of being taken back by the UK. "She is a [British citizen by birth and never applied for dual nationality with Bangladesh](#)," said Shahriar Alam, the Bangladeshi foreign minister. "There is no question of her being allowed to enter into Bangladesh." Sajid Javid, the British home secretary, has faced questions in the Commons as he pushes ahead with trying to deprive Begum of her citizenship.

I am not discussing the rights and wrongs of what Begum might or might not have done will be deleting comments on that issue. I am solely interested in this matter because of what it says about Javid's attitude to citizenship.

Javid is, of course, a product of the City, and I have little doubt that he has embraced its 'values'. There, and for the Tory party of which he is a part, citizenship is just a commodity. It can be traded for tax advantage, or to attract inward investment. It is something to be taken, or left, at will by those with options facilitated by the money available to them.

But this is not what citizenship is. If Javid understood that it is part of identity it would help. But he, like many of those with wealth, think such a notion absurd: they believe they exist beyond the reach of the nation state, and of course, therefore, its ability to tax.

Citizenship is, however, also much more than that. Citizenship is, of course, a matter of human rights. There is, although I have absolutely no doubt that Javid would deny it, a fundamental contract between the citizen and the state. The state affords the citizen protection, come what may. The citizen accepts the obligations to comply with its law in exchange. The wealthy try to opt out of this contract: the rest of us are dependent upon it. And what Javid is trying to do is to deny that it exists, contrary to international law. Begum has a right to citizenship, and he is denying it.

The issues at stake here are much higher than those regarding Begum. What is at stake is whether or not citizenship is an option, or not. I would argue that it is not. The state has a duty to do maintain it. Of course, that means the citizen has a duty to. Have no doubt that Javid's desire to break this relationship is cynical. He may not give a damn about Begum, but he does about the right of some to opt out of their obligations, and that is why he would like to break the citizenship relationship.

He has to lose.