CALL FOR PAPERS

FRENCH REVIEW OF BRITISH STUDIES

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: 30 JUNE 2018

« FEELING BRITISH »

"England has changed. These days it's difficult to tell who's from around here and who's not. Who belongs and who's a stranger. It's disturbing." (Phillips, 2003:3) The first lines of *A Distant Shore* (winner of the Commonwealth Prize in 2004) written by the British Caribbean scholar Caryl Phillips introduce a debate on the issue of British identity in a context of globalized immigration. The author is a British citizen who left England many years ago to settle in the United States, after reaching the conclusion that he would not find his place in a country riddled with numerous contradictions.

Phillips, who was formerly Professor of Migration Studies at the R. Luce Institute, is also a talented chronicler who frequently contributes to *The Guardian*. He represents an emblematic example of the cosmopolitan Britishness chosen by some citizens from "selected" immigration backgrounds. All the same, he feels linked to the community of Windrush generation members who participated in the historical effort of reconstruction in England, and whose degree of belonging to the nation has been recently put to the test, as evidenced in the political turmoil created by the latest Home Office scandal.

As surprising as it may seem, this paradox is but an illustration – among others – of the complexity of societal dynamics which influence the diverse political and cultural spheres of the United Kingdom today. It is a central axis of the present project to understand their nature and scope. How can one assess the adhesion of individuals and social groups to the multi-ethnic and multicultural British nation of our times? Where should their identity be inscribed on the canvas of composite identities, some of which might either be regarded as tokens of tolerance and inclusion, or be considered (by others) as potential threats for the cohesion of the nation?

Such questions will probably raise some interest in a community of researchers who are more and more aware of the political, social and economic problems that have affected the United Kingdom for many years and whose evolutions were followed in recent scientific literature (Dunt, I., 2018 ; Clarke, H. D. *et alii*, 2017, Hannan, D., 2017 ; Espiet-Kilty, R., 2016 ; Révauger, J.-P., 2016 ; Puzzo, C., 2016, among others). These interrogations are all the more relevant as the UK's fringe location seems to make Brexit quite a complicated matter. In a more and more globalized context, such notions as 'national identity' or 'frontier' shape the orientation of the profound mutations which are transforming the lives of Great Britain's and Northern Ireland's people. An in-depth study of the consequent transformations impacting the feeling of belonging has become a matter of some urgency.

To penetrate the deepest strata of British identity, we propose to combine the methods of research in civilization with a multi-disciplinary approach. In order to best understand the mutations in identity that have operated since 1948, we envisage relating perceived or established identities with the sentiment of belonging, which is more personal. We will solicit different contributions from the humanities, with a view to anchoring the investigation process

in an interdisciplinary praxis. In so doing, we intend to confront social reality, collective representations and institutional discourse so as to attain the most comprehensive vision possible of phenomena related to identity mutation in the United Kingdom. Contributors should feel free to rely on sociological fieldwork data, or to study the general trends of social phenomena which emanate from contemporary British cultural production, in all its diversity.

Contributions might explore how political discourse can reflect the uncertainty generated by the issue of belonging to the national family. This question is at the centre of the current reflection on collective and individual identities in Europe (Balibar, E., 2003); as such it provides food for thought by articulating the debate around a central question: what does it mean to be and *feel* British today? Such a feeling is liable to cover different semantic nuances depending on the context.

First, it can refer to the Britishness experienced by nationals respectful of laws and institutions who can trace their affiliation to the nation through history and genealogy. In this lot, there are some citizens who belong to old families of British descent whose names, social status and achievements bolster their firmly-rooted feeling of belonging, this mental construction being most of the time ideologically oriented. Then, it can be synonymous with "experiencing the same feelings as the British", and thus express some form of proximity with the British model, without implying a real kinship. A documentary shot by the BBC in 2015 about the population of young migrants settled in Oldham supports these views. This short film showed that if the majority of Asian residents in this town had no difficulty in saying they felt British they seldom acknowledged living as good neighbours with the British whites of the region, with whom they seem to share very little, apart from a shared access to public facilities. Under such circumstances, the ideal of "building a common house" announced by Prime Minister David Cameron in the aftermath of the 2014 attacks would seem hardly attainable. It even seems reasonable to conclude that multiculturalism and communitarianism may be converging towards the kind of ghettoization (Wievorka, 1998) that by Alibhai-Brown deplores (2003, 2007).

But personal commitment also plays an important part in integration, especially for those who decide to integrate the social fabric against all odds and wring out of their predicament a real success story. This is the case of many Britons of mixed ancestry, or of the proactive *hyphenated British* driven by the will to overcome ethnic boundaries, like the Minister Sajid David, currently Communities Secretary in Theresa May's government. In a gesture reminiscent of Thackeray's commitment to Britishness, David proposed the taking of a "British values oath" (Puzzo, 2016) for those who were on the wrong side of the line.

A third possibility is that of cosmopolitanism. The journey of some individuals is, in this respect, quite an enlightening testimony. Phillips, for instance, was born in St Kitts in 1958 and brought to England at "the portable age of twelve weeks" (1987: 2). He belongs to the first generation of migrants who left the Caribbean for Britain at the request of the Colonial Office so that they could reconstruct the country, as early as 1948. They expected to improve their economic and cultural condition. Phillips's fiction and essays speak to the hearts and minds of those for whom nations and nationalism represent "dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless analysed from below, that is, in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist" (Hobsbawm, 1990: 10). Taking the case of second- or third-generation Black and Asian Britons as well as that of continental Europeans settled in England will also throw into relief some meaningful divergences, especially in terms of attitude towards British cultural institutions.

In the light of this, one cannot relate to such concepts as *national identity* or *agency* without appraising a cross-disciplinary and contrastive approach of the yearning for belonging, or conversely, of the "shame and rage"[1] which inform the identity problems brought to the fore by such thinkers as Stuart Hall, Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith, Paul Gilroy and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. If some aspects of music, cinema, drama and cultural policy-making, seem to celebrate a positive and inclusive vision of hybridity, the same views are not necessarily as popular in the ultra-conservative political groups that advocate narrow parochialism and present otherness in a threatening light. What, one might ask, is the ultimate frontier between Britishness and otherness? Where is it located?

An interdisciplinary perspective on sociology anthropology and political science seems to offer a good opportunity of handling complex but revealing variations, such as those occurring from one generation to another. Out of this will emerge occasions for innovations in the field of sociocultural interactions. We thus hope to bring in a diversity of historical, sociological, artistic and literary contributions to the debate on the formation of national identity, as well as elements of political science, to explain the processes at work in the mutation of Britishness over the last 70 years. In so doing, we plan on confronting a variety of materials concerning the evolution of interethnic and socio-cultural relations from one generation to another, and expect to take advantage of the plurality of views to study the complexity of identity mutation processes.

The following potential axes of study do not constitute an exhaustive list:

- the conceptualization of Britishness in the political debate;
- the formation of new digital identities;
- the representation of the British Other in essay-writing, fiction and the visual arts;
- the evolution of the nation-state from a historical perspective;
- the mapping of geocultural identities in a transnational context;
- Britain, Europe and the Brexit;
- the place of foreigners in British institutions.

Articles must be between 30 000 and 42 000 signs maximum long (5 000 to 7 000 words maximum including spaces, footnotes and bibliography). They may be written in English or in French.

Deadline for submission of proposals (maximum 500 words): June 30, 2018. Authors will be informed of the decision in July 2018. Articles on selected proposals should be completed by the end of December 2018 for submission to peer review.

Submissions should be sent to: frederic.lefrancois@outlook.fr and john.mullen@univ-rouen.fr .

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[1] A week ago, the Louisiana Channel posted a 17-minute video of an interview with Zadie Smith. Synne Rifbjerg interviewed the writer in August 2017 in connection with the Louisiana Literature festival in Denmark. She mentions the importance of 'shame' and 'rage' as basic emotions which give a special flavour to her own writing about the world. [See video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LREBOwjrrw]

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