The Britishness Debate and its Significance for Multiculturalism in Britain

مناقشة الهوية وأهميتها للتعددية الثقافية في بريطانيا العظمى

Le débat identitaire et son importance pour le multiculturalisme en Grande Bretagne

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Introduction

Britishness is, undoubtedly, the most debated contemporary issue as devolution and European integration have highlighted the question of the future of Britain, and ultimately the nature of Britishness. Indeed, the question of national identity is highly debated in British academia and media, though the very meaning of Britishness remains unsettled. The question, therefore, is about the existence of a common national identity in a society marked by post-war immigration, globalisation and devolution.

Contemporary debate about Britishness is justified because of the impact of immigration and multiculturalism. But more significantly, the future of Britishness is definitely linked to devolution and the Brexit or withdrawal from the European Union[1]. In fact, immigration from the New Commonwealth has constituted a threat to cultural homogeneity ; devolution has endangered the Union and could even cause the break- up of the UK. Britain's links with the European Union has led to conflicts between British Common Laws tradition and the European written constitutional tradition.

Therefore, discussing Britishness is examining the future of Britain which has long been challenged by immigration, devolution, multiculturalism and further European integration. Today this last challenge is being replaced by the Brexit which would have different consequences on the future of Britain. The ultimate question is, accordingly, about the future place of Britishness in the modern multicultural Britain. This article will highlight the multicultural dimension : does Britishness have a real place in 21st century multicultural Britain ?

In what follows, I will focus on the existence of a common British national identity in a society marked by post-war immigration, globalisation and

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1. Britain has been faced for decades by further integration into the European Union.

devolution. I will devote some attention to certain idea of historical set of values that unite all the different peoples of the United Kingdom. Thus, this paper will be centred on three areas. The first will discuss the very meaning of Britishness and the debates that have occurred about it in the recent past. Next, I will consider the disjunction of the debate on Britishness when New Labour's project of reinforcing Britishness was launched. Finally, I will look into the future of Britishness, especially from the viewpoint of ethnic minorities exploring whether Britishness has been shared or denied among different national and ethnic groups ; and ultimately what it means for the development of British multiculturalism.

1. Defining and Debating Britishness

Debates about Britishness have never ceased since ages which clearly reveal that contemporary debates are really part of a continuum. Some observers have even diagnosed a "crisis" of Britishness as a consequence of devolution, the end of the Empire, the problems of the monarchy, the political insignificance of Protestantism and traditional institutions.

Many have argued that Britishness, unlike Englishness or Scottishness, is a political identity based upon a set of political institutions, suggesting therefore an absence of ethnic or cultural element in it. This is why H.G Wells said that "the great advantage of being British is that we do not have a national dress" (qtd. in Willets 2009 : 57).

It is undoubtedly a difficult task to define Britishness[2] across geographical and political divides. So, one has to discuss Britishness in the light of multiple identities of Britain today and taking into account historical antecedent. The British question has always divided scholars. Indeed, some of them consider that Britishness has no substance and is, therefore, inclined to disappear as a result of devolution and European integration. According to Marquand, since the British Empire has been dissolved, Britain has become an administrative structure that is "bloodless, historyless and affectless" (qtd. in Nam-Kook 2011 : 140).

If some oppose the imposition of Britishness since the beginning of the Union between the United Kingdom and Ireland in 1801, in the last hundred years many Prime Ministers were not English like David Lloyd George, James Ramsay MacDonald and Andrew Bonar Law. More recently, Gordon Brown and his advocacy of Britishness in the twenty-first century recalls strongly those

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2. It suggests the inclusion of all the different peoples of the UK.

who were once at the centre of power addressing the multi-national nature of Britain (Ward 2009 : 3).

In contrast, for other scholars Britain has contributed to the development of democratic solidarity between the four nations since 1707[3]. There exists today a common identity and interests between the four nations such as the National Health Service. According to Linda Colley, Britain was a historically political construction neither based on cultural nor on ethnic homogeneity. It was formed from the early 18th century by the union between four nations namely England, Scotland, Wales and later Ireland. She argued that the emergence of Britishness has been the consequence of Protestantism and wars against European others, especially the French Catholic. It was as well prompted by the pride of the British Empire, suggesting that the construction of the British identity was completed in the 19th century and concluded in the First World War (Nam-Kook 2011 : 140).

A conception of Britishness has been offered by Peter Madgwick and Richard Rose in the introduction of their book published in 1982, *The Territorial Dimension in UK Politics*. In fact, they referred to the United Kingdom as a "fifth nation" acting as a unitary state notwithstanding its multi-national composition. Hence, they explained that most studies of British politics concentrated only on one component of the UK neglecting the relationship between Westminster and the nations (Aughey 2009 : 5).

One can endorse the assumption made by Vernon Bogdanor in *The New British Constitution*[4] that " Britain is less of an artificial or imagined construct, and British loyalty is more organic and primordial than many commentators have suggested " (qtd. in Aughey 2009 :5).

On the other hand, the four nations have always faced the dominance of England. Indeed, while some accepted being British and having a national identity of origin, others refused British identity and chose their national identity. Furthermore, Britishness remains the legacy of the British Empire that promoted individual freedom and tolerance of difference. But Welsh and Scottish nationalists have asked for a more radical form of self-government and further European integration while the majority of English 'called British' have campaigned against European integration in the name of protecting parliamentary sovereignty (Nam-Kook 2011 : 141).

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3. The Treaty of Union made of England, Wales and Scotland into Great Britain, and then the Act of Union of 1801 established the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
4. It was published in 2009.

Moreover, British people today are primarily concerned with their national identity as Scottish, English or Welsh, and see the British identity as secondary or even an identity they no longer want. As a consequence, nationalists have called for the break- up of the United Kingdom into its component nations. They also think that the British state as well as the British national identity was a political creation which served the interests of some groups (Gamble 2009 : 1).

It is worth mentioning that the United Kingdom has always been from its inception a multinational state dominated by English though the other national cultures have not been superseded by a new national culture ; on the contrary if English was the common language, the other languages survived and even revived as was the case of the Welsh language.

Therefore, Britishness as an idea and a set of loyalties emerged from the eighteenth century and co-existed with other identities. According to Manuel Castells, Britain is "a communal entity constructed in people's minds and collective memory by the sharing of history and political projects"(29). This actually suggests that the very existence of Britishness owed to internal trade, migration and intermarriage between people from the four nations of the United Kingdom. In addition to other influences in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries mainly Protestantism as the majority religion which permitted the sharing of a common language ; wars with Spain and France, and the monarchy represented by the royal family but which no longer has the same capacity to foster a sense of British unity (Colley 2009 : 22).

Furthermore, the separation of Ireland from the United Kingdom in 1922 did not diminish the allegiance to the British state. In fact, the roots of Britishness went deep especially with the advent of democracy in the twentieth century which increased ideas of Britishness through the creation of British institutions such as the BBC and the National Health Service. The two World Wars had also an immense impact on the British regarding the sacrifices made to defend the British state and the Empire.

However, many elements that have contributed in the making of national identity have disappeared. Indeed, the Empire vanished, post-war immigration accentuated the cultural diversity of Britain, Protestantism lost its major cultural force ; and peoples from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have asserted their national identities and ask for self-government (Parekh 2009 : 35).

Therefore, attachment to Britishness has diminished with the weakening of the two enterprises that symbolised really Britishness in the twentieth century,

namely Empire and welfare as both were sustaining support for the British state in the four nations. Still, the BBC despite having been criticised as London-centric is being able to generate some image of communion across the United Kingdom as it has always played a major role in promoting a cultural image of Britain (Colley 2009 : 25).

Therefore, while admitting that Britishness has been contested in the past, this has even resulted in crisis, for instance Catholic and nationalist Ireland's wars against the British between 1916 and 1921. Britishness still matters in the twenty-first century as many in Britain consider themselves to share something that amounts to Britishness namely institutions and values. Moreover, if discussions of Britishness continue, it is more likely that it has a future, as suggested by New Labour's Britishness discourse. Britain needs more than ever before a coherent conception of its identity in order to forge a sense of common belonging.

2. New Labour's Britishness Project and other Competing Discourses

The concept of Britishness has occupied the nation's political discourse with Blair as the leader of New Labour. Indeed, Blair's book, *New Britain : My Vision of a Young Country* reveals his attempt to occupy the 'One Nation' territory once occupied by the Conservative Party. In a speech made at the Labour Party Conference in October 1995, Blair stated :

> New Labour cannot create New Britain alone. I challenge this country : let us rouse ourselves to a new moral purpose for our nation. Let's build a new and young country that can be aside the old prejudices that have dominated our land for generations. A nation for all the people, built by all the people, where old divisions are cast out. A new spirit in the nation based on working together, unity, solidarity, partnership. One Britain. This is the patriotism for the future. (qtd. in Pitcher 2009 : 42)

Clearly, Blair's recourse to the concept of national identity cannot be reduced to a mere populist rhetoric, but it was substantially motivated by the Party's concern with regional devolution in Scotland and Wales. Some observers have accordingly suggested that the incomplete devolutionist project as conceived by New Labour, has definitely led to confusions around the concept of 'Britishness'. Nevertheless, this very concept has been of primary importance to New Labour in maintaining a hierarchical relation between the devolved national areas and the British parliament in England. Hence, New Labour has become as stated by

Gordon Brown the "party of the Union" despite the Conservative Party being officially a Unionist Party (Pitcher 2009 : 44).

Thus, it is thanks to Blair's New Labour that the concept of Britishness has become a significant feature of the nation's political discourse. Later, in his speech on Britishness in December 2006, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair mentioned several variations on the theme such as belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance and equal treatment. But he also emphasised the fact that these values do not dispense with multiculturalism completely. He argued "we have a duty to express any difference in a way fully consistent with the shared values that bind us together" (qtd. in Rattansi 2011 : 121).

Thus, discussing national identity under New Labour has always revolved around the idea of 'core values'. Indeed, Blair and Brown have tended to express the uniqueness of the British in terms of core values in the absence of a defining framework like in France, "liberté, égalité, fraternité" or the American "land of the free" (Rattansi 2011 : 120).

It is important pointing out that New Labour's Britishness project has had the objective to displace a 'One Nation' Tory Party from the centre ground of British politics, and to replace it as "the Party of the Union". It has also been a means to foster a sense of social cohesion largely undermined by privatisation and welfare reform. But ultimately Britishness was for New Labour a political project that marked a new era of governmentality where "nations have been recreating their identities throughout recorded history that logos and branding techniques, advertising campaigns and festivals, speeches and trade fairs become the new tools with which national identity may be manipulated by the contemporary British state" (qtd. in Pitcher 2009 : 47).

Furthermore, Brown's revival of the idea of Britishness has been prompted by the understanding that support for Unionist Parties diminished while the rise of nationalisms has put into question the purpose of the union and ultimately the significance of Britishness. One has to consider in more detail Brown's contribution to the revival of Britishness. Indeed, Brown has attempted to tell a good story of Britishness in which he combines elements of social democratic policy within a wider neo-liberal polity because of his belief that the Thatcherite Revolution has undermined the beliefs in social democracy. Therefore, Brown's account of Britishness is a synthesis of the Labour story of Britain with an advocacy of the post-Thatcherite view of the world (Hassan 2009 : 91-2).

Moreover, Gordon Brown was concerned with resolving the anomalies of the asymmetrical union that characterizes the United Kingdom, and more specifically the English Question known as 'the West Lothian Question'[5], that is calling for 'English votes for English laws' instead of allowing Scots MPs to vote English laws. This can partly explain Brown's choice of Britishness as a set of values capable to unite the English into the United Kingdom (Hassan 2009 : 93).

Interestingly, Brown unlike other politicians has brought to the fore the implication of devolution for Britishness. In many of his speeches he has stated that while devolution may represent a challenge to the cohesion of the state and society, this challenge is contained by shared values of Britishness. Indeed, he made the point clearly in his British Council Annual Lecture in 2004 :

> Take devolution and nationalism. While the UK has always been a country of different nations and thus of plural identity… the issue is whether we retreat into more exclusive identities rooted in 19th century conceptions of blood, race and territory, or whether we are still able to celebrate a British identity which is bigger than the sum of its parts and a Union that is strong because of the values we share and because of the way these values are expressed through our history and our institutions. (qtd. in Jeffery 2009 : 112)

According to Brown, Britain was once defined by certain achievements in particular its empire and its military victories which are indeed part of its past, instead he proposed a refreshed British identity which would express Britain's economic success which allowed the development of a new sense of national purpose. Brown also mentioned the "British tradition of liberty" which recalls strongly the Victorian depiction of the British as a providential people fighting for good against evil (Gamble 2009 : 4).

Again, Brown argues that the concept of Britishness rests on a number of key values namely liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all, along with a number of key qualities such as creativity, innovation, enterprise and internationalism. For him Britishness must be inclusive, it "is a strong sense of shared patriotism", arguing that "Patriotism…defines a nation not by race or ethnicity, but by seeing us all part of a collective project from which we all gain and to which we all contribute. Society is – as the great thinkers have long told us - a contract, even a covenant, in which we recognise that our destinies are interlinked" (qtd. in Thomassen 2017 :224).

5. It was raised in 1979 by West Lothian Scotland, MP Tam Dalyell.

Therefore, New Labour's new narrative was meant to articulate an inclusive British citizenship as multiculturalism was seen as emphasising diversity and separate development. Besides, many have considered the stress of British values as a means to respond to anxieties over the "war on terror" and gaining the "hearts and minds" of British Muslim communities by emphasising common British values.

Nevertheless, one can wonder if senses of belonging, loyalty to the nation, and patriotism can effectively be instilled by citizenship tests and ceremonies. Most historians and social scientists were not in favour of top-down national measures[6], they were instead for creating attachments through common memorable experiences and social interactions that can definitely reinforce a sense of belonging. Thus, many studies conducted at Oxford University[7] suggest that the majority of the population continues to have a sense of British identity. Moreover, most research on ethnic minorities reveal multiple and transnational belonging with varying degrees of attachment to "being British" (Rattansi 2011 : 123-25).

On the other hand, Brown's conception of Britishness has been contested because of its tendency to be identified with social cohesion or political union instead of stressing procedural values as tolerance towards the views of others and living together in order to find a common ground despite of cultural differences. David Cameron, the leader of the Conservatives, also criticised Brown's willingness to institutionalise Britishness (Gamble 2009 : 6). Besides, Brown's strong reliance on shared British values ignores that most of them are not specific to Britain. People in different parts of the UK do not have to share the same values to be British. Brown responded that Britishness is the sum of mutual articulation of the three values and this articulation is the result of a particular British experience (Thomassen 2017 : 25).

Lord Parekh, the British political theorist, too responded to those who wrongly argue that these values[8] are not exclusively British, affirming that they are indeed so since they are the products of the struggles of the British people and are embedded in, and draw their vitality from their unique historical experience. These are collective achievements and the British prioritise these values differently from the way other societies do which make of Britain a moral community (Parekh 2009 : 38).

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6. It includes national flags, oaths and anthems.
7. Based on surveys from the 1960s to the present.
8. Individual liberty, equality of respect and rights, tolerance and the spirit of moderation and fair play.

Nonetheless, the London bombings of 7 July 2005 have made the British question even more pertinent. Indeed, the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown responded to these events through British values. He argued in a lecture delivered in 2006 that devolution would not lead to the break-up of Britain explaining that respect for ethnic diversity must be accompanied by respect for shared British values and a common Britishness. Indeed, the shared identity of Britain has always been primordial for Gordon Brown (Bryant 2009 : 6).

Clearly, Brown has been a fervent defender of British values, and therefore of Britishness. In fact, he argued that the British values of liberty, duty and fair play, along with the British recognised qualities of adaptability and a creative and internationalist openness to new ideas and influences have definitely shaped British national identity. He makes reference to "a golden thread which runs through British history of the individual standing firm for freedom and liberty against tyranny and the arbitrary use of power", linking liberty with tolerance of difference and recognising, therefore, the contribution of immigrants to British culture (Bryant 2009 : 6).

Besides, the "British idea of duty as the virtue that reinforces neighbourliness and enshrines the idea of a public realm and public service" has given rise to local democracy. Similarly, the value of fair play - Adam Smith's helping hand that complements the invisible hand- has fostered the principle of social justice. Finally, the combination of both values of duty and fair play has given rise to great institutions such as the National Health Service and the BBC. Hence, for Brown it is important to show respect for common values in a multi-ethnic and multi-national state. He stated that the best of Britain's past "has created a distinctive British identity which is incompatible with both individual enslavement to some arbitrarily defined collective interest and individual indifference to society. Instead, the British way depends on a strong cohesive society in which in return for responsibility there is opportunity for all"(qtd. in Bryant 2009 : 6).

Brown unambiguous' perception of Britishness celebrates the uniqueness of the United Kingdom and stresses its multicultural and multinational basis ; he states in an interview in 1999 :

> I see Britain as being the first country in the world that can be a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multinational state. America, at its best, is a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, but America does not have nationalities within identifiable political units in the way that Britain does. We have a chance to forge a

unique pluralist democracy where diversity becomes a source of strength. (qtd. in Hassan 2009 : 90)

Now, I want to argue that Brown's Britishness discourse is one among other competing discourses on Britishness. For instance, a discourse of Britishness and multiculturalism that tends to marginalise cultural, ethnic and religious identities and exclude them from any belonging to the nation, namely the Norman Tebbit's cricket test[9]. More significantly, Cameron's controversial speech on radicalisation and Islamic extremism made at the annual Munich Security Conference on February 5th 2011 remains the perfect example of a competing discourse. Indeed, Cameron identified the roots of extremism as "a question of identity" explaining that the 7/7 attacks perpetrated by British born Muslim who failed to identify with the collective society as well as with Islam inherited from their parents did find a sense of belonging in Islamist extremist groups. He clearly stated that the doctrine of state multiculturalism has allowed ethnic minorities to live separate lives, suggesting as an alternative "a much more active, muscular liberalism", one that is articulated around certain values that actively promotes : democracy, freedom of speech, the rule of law (Baglieri Campo 2015 : 25).

Even if Cameron proposes in his speech a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone, his vision of British identity is indeed exclusionary as he brands Muslims in Britain as different from "us" non-Muslims (Thomassen 2017 : 1-3). Moreover, Cameron's speech has been criticised for blaming multiculturalism for the problems of integration and even the rise of Islamist extremism. He associates multiculturalism with a weakening of "our collective identity". On the contrary, Moddod[10] explained that multiculturalism has not failed in Britain but that the problem of British national identity, and therefore multiculturalism can be resolved by "bringing new communities and not just individuals into a relation of equal respect" because he explains that "older forms of British national identity, which was once meant to be 'white', are obstacles to the creation of a more diverse and inclusive national identity" (qtd. in Baglieri Campo 2015 : 27).

In the light of this, it is safe to argue that Brown's Britishness discourse is a response to a diverse society marked by devolution and the rise of Scottish

9. It refers to the lack of loyalty to the England cricket team among South Asian and Caribbean immigrants, suggesting that they should support England at the sport of cricket rather than their native countries.
10. He is a professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Bristol and a leading authority on multiculturalism.

nationalism especially after the 2014 independence referendum and the 2016 Brexit referendum. It is also a response to the main challenge of multiculturalism especially the Muslim question. Ultimately, Brown's Britishness discourse transcends the old politics of Left and Right in a New Britain characterised only by national and cultural, ethnic and religious differences.

If there is somehow an agreement about values that unite British people, a question still remains about how to foster Britishness. Many researchers have suggested defining Britishness in an inclusive way that includes all ethnic minorities. In fact, a MORI poll conducted in 2002 revealed that the majority of British people were in favour of defining Britishness in an inclusive way[11]. Modood aptly argues that, "an inclusive national identity is respectful of and builds upon the identities that people value and does not trample upon them" (Moddod 2013 : 139).

All in all, since the 1707 Act of Union, Britishness has been a capacious concept accommodating a variety of national and cultural differences. It might also adapt the demands of a multicultural society.

3. Re-designing Britishness in an Age of Diversity

The Britishness question remains still unresolved ; how to re-design Britishness for the 21ˢᵗ Century ? To this question many have tried to bring a relevant answer. Indeed, Colley suggested that the multi-national and multi-cultural diverse Britain could have a future only if it is able to sustain its "synthetic and capacious"[12], combinatory and accommodative feature that Britishness has had for centuries (Bryant 2009 : 6) .

On the other hand, the prominent multiculturalist, Bhikhu Parekh who chaired the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain[13] has contributed significantly to this debate through the publication of its report in October 2000, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, referred to commonly as the Parekh Report. It is interesting to consider the interpretation of Britishness in the light of the controversy that surrounded the report. Indeed, while the report emphasises the need to re-imagine Britain as a multicultural nation, it was largely dismissed by much of the British press.

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11. The findings of the MORI poll have been supported by the report 'Living Apart Together' published by the think tank Policy Exchange in 2007.
12. It has no necessary ethnic or cultural element.
13. This Commission was established by the Runnymede Trust, a famous UK race think tank in 1998 and the project was launched by the then Home Secretary Jack Straw.

Broadly speaking, the press reported that for ethnic minorities, Britishness is a reminder of colonisation and that it has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. The report adds, "Whiteness is nowhere featured as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that Britishness is racially coded. Race is deeply entwined with political culture and with the idea of nation and underpinned by a distinctively British kind of reticence" (CFMEB 38-9).

The whole report was met with criticism especially from the English press, and was mainly considered as an accusation of racism. Clearly, journalists misrepresented and misquoted the Report, failing to perceive the nuance between "racial connotations" and "racism" (Fortier 2008 : 26).

The report clearly states that the deep antagonism to racial and cultural difference has to disappear otherwise the idea of a multicultural post-nation remains an empty promise. It also describes Britain as "a community of communities". Consequently, many media reported that the report suggested that the term Britishness has racial connotation and was no longer appropriate in a multicultural society (Nam-Kook 2011 : 153).

On the other hand, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw who launched the Commission declared, " Unlike the Runnymede Trust, I firmly believe that there is a future for Britain and a future for Britishness. I am proud to be British and of what I believe to be the best of British values". He even accused the Commission of ignoring what Britain had achieved in race relation, claiming "indeed, last year I spoke publicly about how the concept of Britishness has become an inclusive plural one with people happily defining themselves as Black British, or Chinese British" (qtd. in Nam-Kook 2011 : 154).

After these attacks, Lord Parekh published a letter, in *The Times*, in which he stated again an official opinion of the Commission,

> All we suggest is that, given the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales and eventually in English regions, Britain's nationhood is best secured by seeing itself as a community of communities, we say racial not racist. For centuries the British population was overwhelmingly white, and hence it is perfectly natural that Britishness connotes whiteness ; things are now changing. We warmly welcome the increasing deracialization of the new Britishness which allows Blacks, Asians, and others to accept it with enthusiasm. (qtd. in Nam-Kook 2011 : 154)

Afterwards, David Coleman declared in a letter in *The Times* that "despite the Runnymede Trust Report's many ill-advised proposals and the misguided

assumptions, its recommendation that Britain should be declared officially multicultural may be helpful" (qtd. in Nam-Kook 2011 : 155).

While the Parekh Report rejects Englishness, it chooses Britishness as an appropriate term to re-imagine multi-ethnic Britain. The report states unambiguously that "Britishness is not ideal but at least it appears acceptable, particularly when suitably qualified – black British, Indian British, British Muslim, and so on" (CFMEB 2000 : 38). Obviously, the controversy about the Parekh Report reveals that Britain and Britishness still have a future especially when faced by otherness on the form of immigrants and ethnic minorities.

It should come as little surprise that Britishness is important for ethnic minorities because of its republican connotation[14], whereas national identities are more exclusive and tend therefore to discard ethnic minorities. Thus, devolution as well as the break- up of the UK is less advantageous for ethnic minorities who can hardly be defined as English, Scots or Welsh. As an illustration, a General Household Survey conducted in 2001 revealed that 57 per cent of ethnic minorities chose their identity as British, while only 11 per cent chose their identity as one of English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish. Not surprisingly, only 44 per cent of white British chose their identity as British, while 54 per cent chose their identity as one of English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish (Nam-Kook 2011 : 155). Along similar line, liberal writers argue that Britishness attracts more ethnic minorities who have definitely found their marks in the set of values and laws which the British identity encompasses (English 2009 : 129).

Yasmin Alibhai Brown warned against the negative effects of ethnic nationalism on ethnic minorities, and called for embracing Britishness as a civic device to bind people together without recourse to ethnicity (Nam-Kook 2011 : 156). So, if Britishness can accommodate ethnic minorities, devolution too has the capacity to respond to multicultural needs.

On the other hand, it has been argued that multicultural policies introduced in the 1960s have seriously undermined Britishness as a common identity as they were encouraging ethnic minorities to maintain their distinctive identities. Thus, Britishness has become once more an issue in British politics with the advent of new challenges, namely devolution, globalisation, and especially since the 2001 riots in northern England[15]. Politicians claimed that multiculturalism has created segregation between the communities. In fact, the then head of

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14. Ethnic minorities could be British regardless of colour or race.
15. They concerned the cities of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley, and involved white and South Asian communities.

the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips has suggested that multiculturalism entailed separateness, suggesting jettisoning the policies of multiculturalism and instead emphasising "a core of Britishness". Brown too proposed a "British day" to celebrate the nation's cultural values (Kallevik 2009 : 9).

Again, Colley has responded clearly to the question of the future of Britishness in an attempt to bring all the peoples of the United Kingdom together irrespective of their national identities. Indeed, she stated in a lecture delivered in 1999 at 10 Downing street, "since so many of the constituent parts of the old-style Britishness have been dismantled or have ceased to function effectively, it is possible successfully to re-design and refloat a concept of Britishness for the 21st century ? " (qtd. in Bryant 2009 : 5).

She went further to say "Britishness is a synthetic and capacious concept with no necessary ethnic or cultural overtones" capable of sustaining the multinational, multicultural and infinitely diverse Britain of today. She added that all Britons could agree to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade, the Reform Act of 1832 and why not the independence of India in 1947. For her it is important to "pillage the past selectively and engage with the present, to evaluate heritage and draw upon cultural capital" (Bryant 2009 : 5).

It bears pointing out that Britishness is constantly being reshaped because it has never been a fixed entity ; it is always on the move as well. Once more the question of Britishness poses the question of whether Britain is in the process of breaking up. The future of Britain is certainly a question of choice as the shape of the Union has already changed and the Brexit is another proof that Britain is always in the process of making. Moreover, a distinction between Britishness as an identity and Britishness as a political association is necessary because while people may have multiple identities, they are members of the same civic association. For instance, an independent Scotland[16] will have made a decision about political association, but it will carry the historical and cultural baggage of Britishness. A Scotland that rejects political independence will not have diminished its Scottishness. Therefore, Britishness allows the flourishing of multiple identities and loyalties.

Along similar line, Parekh states that "Britain is not just a formal political union….but rather a distinct political community with a recognisable identity, over the centuries its constituent nations have interacted so as to modify the

16. With the prospect of the withdrawal from the EU, Scotland may request for a second independence   referendum.

condition of one another's existence and created a common political culture" (Parekh 2009 : 36). Unsurprisingly, the destiny of Britain continues to be debated. New Labour have to a certain extent succeeded in dealing with the challenges facing Britain namely devolution and multiculturalism. It was also able to include ethnic minorities in the political community especially after the 2001 disturbances in northern England. New Labour did also recognize that the constitutive character of national identity is compatible with ethnic and cultural pluralism. In the light of these observations, Britain and Britishness seem still to have a future (Nam-Kook 2011 : 157).

It is worth recalling to those who have predicted the demise of British identity that for many inhabitants of the British Isles some sort of dual pattern of identification to nation and state has for a long time been the norm. Moreover, while many of the elements of traditional British identity have been eroded or greatly altered, this seems to have produced a refashioning rather than disintegration of what its means to be British.

The best hope for the survival of the Union and ultimately the political concept of Britishness is to be found certainly in the promotion of national and ethnic identities as complementary rather than conflictual identities. Such layered or hyphenated identities might be seen as practical means of reconciling the tensions of political organisation and cultural identity within a liberal framework. Parekh argues that the wider British identity and the narrower national identities do not compete in the same political space, and since each generally respects the other, every Briton can be British without ceasing to be Scottish, Welsh or Irish (Parekh 2009 : 37).

Indeed, some advocates of multiculturalism like M. Williams[17] consider that a common national identity inevitably carries with it an exclusionary component that is homogenizing and incompatible with respect for difference, others like Parekh think that a political community should promote a strong sense of national identity and be open to distinctive identities of minorities within the community (Carens 2015 : 265).

Parekh is convinced that Britain just as it has learned to respect the diversity of its four nations should be able to respect the diversity of its immigrants. For instance, the Indians just as Scots can be British without abandoning the valuable components of their cultural identity ; immigrants can even shape the wider British culture, and reinterpret their cultures accordingly. Therefore, a

17. He wrote in 2002, *Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education.*

liberal democratic state should construct its national identity that include all its citizens not only through rules and rights but also through a recounting of the history of the nation in a way that enable citizens of immigration origin to identify with it, as has been recommended by the Parekh Report that "the national story" should be rethought to produce a new collective self-image that would be "more flexible, inclusive and cosmopolitan" (CFMEB 2000 : 15). It is important for a political community to develop a view of its national identity. Indeed, a shared view of national identity is particularly important in a multicultural society as it needs to "cultivate a common sense of belonging among its diverse communities" (Parekh 2006 : 231).

However, a shared national identity should be defined in terms of the institutions and values that all members of the political community share ; it should allow for other identities and be defined in an inclusive way ; and finally it should accept all citizens as equally legitimate members of the community. In short, a plural and inclusive view of national identity is definitely a means to foster multiculturalism.

Conclusion

Britain is constantly in the making, it is not a fixed entity, it is an ongoing political project, and to be British it to participate in this project of commitment and critical sympathy (Parekh 2009 : 39). A successful multicultural society needs to develop a sense of belonging to one's country ; therefore, Britishness more than a legal concept remains necessary for the survival of multiculturalism. In short, one can say that British identity is a global identity and certainly multicultural, constituted of national and ethnic cultural communities. Britain's image of a providential and an exceptional nation as well as the quest for Britishness have definitely influenced the whole stand of the British nation which is today facing a very difficult and uncertain withdrawal from the European Union without a prospect of return.

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Abstract

The British question has defined significantly the development of multiculturalism. Indeed, a recurrent question is about the future place of Britishness in the modern multicultural Britain. Its future is undoubtedly linked to immigration, devolution and the Brexit. Therefore, a revival of the debate about Britishness is justified as circumstances changed. In this paper, I focus on Britishness as a discourse about multicultural Britain. I will examine, in particular, how the debate on national identity has been a means to reframe national belonging in pluralist terms. The emphasis is on the existence of a common British national identity in a society marked by post-war immigration, globalisation and devolution. I will devote some attention to certain idea of historical set of values that unite all the different peoples of the United Kingdom. This article is centred on three areas. The first is about the very meaning of Britishness and the debates that have occurred about it in the past. Next, I will consider the disjunction of the debate on Britishness when New Labour's project of reinforcing Britishness was launched. Finally, I will conclude with the future of Britishness from the viewpoint of ethnic minorities exploring whether Britishness has been shared or denied among different national and ethnic groups ; and ultimately what it means for the development of British multiculturalism.

Keywords

الملخص

إن مسـألة الهويـة فـي بريطانيـا مرتبطـة بالنمـوذج البريطانـي المتعـدد الثقافـات. فبريطانيـا باعتبارهـا مجتمعـا متعـدد الثقافـات تسـعى إلـى إيجـاد هويـة وطنيـة تجمـع بيـن الأقاليـم الجغرافيـة الأربعـة المكونـة لهـا. و يظـل النقـاش حـول الهويـة البريطانيـة متواصلا بالنظـر إلـى التطـورات المعاصـرة لا سـيما الهجـرة و الحكـم الذاتـي و خـروج بريطانيـا مـن الاتحـاد الأوروبـي.

يتنـاول هـذا المقـال مسـألة الهويـة فـي إطـار التعـدد الثقافـي الـذي يميـز بريطانيـا و يسـمح هـذا النقـاش بتحديـد تأثيـر موضـوع الهويـة علـى المجتمـع البريطانـي بشـكل عـام.

يتـم التركيـز علـى وجـود هويـة وطنيـة مشـتركة فـي مجتمـع يتميـز بالهجـرة و الحكـم الذاتـي و العولمـة. كمـا سـتسـلط الأضـواء علـى وجـود قيـم تاريخيـة تجمـع بيـن جميـع شـعوب المملكـة المتحـدة.

فهـذا البحـث سـوف يشـمل ثلاثـة محـاور. المحـور الأول يتعلـق بمفهـوم الهويـة الوطنيـة البريطانيـة و النقاشـات التـي تمخضـت عنـه فـي الماضـي. ثـم سـوف أتطـرق إلـى مشـروع دعـم الهويـة الوطنيـة المقتـرح مـن طـرف حـزب العمـال. و أخيـرا سـأركز علـى مسـتقبل الهويـة الوطنيـة مـن وجهـة نظـر الأقليـات الاثنيـة و كـذا تأثيرهـا علـى مسـتقبل النمـوذج البريطانـي المتعـدد الثقافـات.

كلمات مفتاحية

التعـدد الثقافـي؛ بريطانيـا؛ الهويـة الوطنيـة؛ الهويـة البريطانيـة؛ الحكـم الذاتـي؛ الأقليـات الاثنيـة.

Résumé

La question identitaire en Grande-Bretagne est certainement liée au modèle multiculturel britannique. En effet, la Grande-Bretagne est une société multiculturelle par excellence en quête d'une identité qui rassemble les quatre nations qui forment la nation britannique. Aussi, le débat identitaire est-il justifié au regard des récents développements à savoir l'immigration, l'autonomie de gouvernance, le Brexit et la globalisation. Cet article permet d'aborder cette question identitaire dans le contexte du multiculturalisme britannique et déterminer ainsi son impact sur la société en général. En outre, l'accent est mis sur l'existence d'une identité nationale commune dans une société caractérisée par l'immigration, l'autonomie de gouvernance et la globalisation. Une attention particulière est portée à l'existence de valeurs historiques qui unies les différents peuples du Royaume-Uni. Ainsi donc, ce thème est abordé à travers trois volets. La première porte sur la définition de l'identité britannique et les débats qui en ont découlé par le passé. Le second volet concerne le projet identitaire initié par le parti travailliste. Le dernier volet porte sur l'avenir de l'identité britannique du point de vue des minorités ethniques et son impact sur le développement du modèle multiculturel britannique.

Mots-clés

Multiculturalisme ; Grande-Bretagne ; Identité nationale ; Identité britannique « Britannicité » ; Autonomie de gouvernance ; Minorités ethniques.