Call for Papers – British Identities Medialised

Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of British Cultures

University of Salzburg, 17 to 19 November 2022

With publications like Jeremy Paxman's *The English* (2000), Kate Fox's *Watching the English* (2004), or Mark Easton's *Britain, etc.* (2012), the last decades have seen a conspicuous number of texts attempting to define and re-define Britishness in a changing world. This trend has been seen as indicative of a contemporary crisis of Britishness, of the need to re-define it in view of its changing status in the world brought about by the end of Empire. The process of devolution and the potential end of the United Kingdom in particular through Scottish independence or a potential Irish unification; continued economic difficulties which became particularly apparent with the 2008 financial crisis; new forms of immigration, which once more have changed the makeup of those living in the British Isles, all these developments have challenged ideas of national identities in the British Isles.

The Brexit referendum, which has been seen by many as being just as much about Britishness as about Europe (see e.g. Geoffrey Wheatcroft 21 June 2016, *The Guardian*), is another sign that identities in the British Isles continue to be a controversial topic. Thus, it is unsurprising that the years of the Brexit negotiations have seen another wave of books on Britishness including Robert Ford's and Maria Sobolewska's *Brexitland* (2020); or Peter Mitchell's *Imperial Nostalgia* (2021). While Brexit was certainly of particular significance for renegotiating Britishness of late, other significant trends that challenge and redefine Britishness within an international and national context include the 'Black Lives Matter'-movement, and the 'Rhodes Must Fall'-initiative, revealing yet again the importance of individuals and their (hi-)stories for the definition of cultures (see Bingham 2010).

Most of these (re)constructions of national identity take place via different media forms, where they "drive as well as reflect" (McQuail 2010) present needs, political interests and topical events. Hence, the key focus of this conference will be on the particular relevance that media, but also specific media genres, have played and still play in the shaping of Britishness, but also Englishness, Scottishness, Welshness or Northern Irishness. Heritage movies like *Howards End* as they thrived in the conservative Thatcher years, the heritage industry, particularly as represented by the National Trust or English Heritage in the late 20th century, or modern definitions of Britishness, as presented in the comedy formats *Muzlamic* (BBC Three), *Lady Parts* (Channel 4) or *Late Night Mash* (Dave), all shape very different forms of Britishness, though some of them probably go against former Minister of State for Media and Data John Whittingdale's new rules to protect and support "distinctively British" public service broadcasting (s. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/john-whittingdales-speech-to-the-arts-cambridge-convent

ion-2021). In the twenty-first century, new media and streaming platforms play a major role – we might think of Oliver Dowden's tweets in the 'Rule, Britannia' debate, Tom Daley's jumper on Instagram, Youtube channels, podcasts, augmented guided tours – all these have shaped, diversified or challenged the national identities available in the British Isles.

In this conference, then, we will examine how media shape the nation and construct different versions of national identities in the British Isles. While there will be a focus on present-day examples, we also welcome historic examples from a variety of media, such as statues, museums, history books, or memorial plaques.

Topics may include, but are not limited to a discussion of:

- portrayals of British personalities and Britishness in film, television, stand-up comedy shows and on streaming platforms, etc.
- Youtube clips that reflect on or intend to teach and inform about how to be British / Scottish / Welsh / Northern Irish or English
- social media posts and broadcasts by and about famous Brits or about cultural icons
- museum spaces that focus on individual lives to portray historical periods or movements
- statues, ceremonies and monuments (past and present)
- recent attempts by politicians to redefine Britishness (for instance in the Museum of Brexit or the One Britain One Nation-Initiative)
- music, national songs and radio broadcasts
- schoolbooks and children's books propagating versions of Britishness (historic and contemporary)
- websites and advertising campaigns fostering alternative national or regional identities

Our Keynote Speakers

Professor Corinne Fowler (Professor of Postcolonial Literature, University of Leicester)

Professor Maria Pramaggiore (Professor of Media Studies and Dean of Graduate Studies at Maynooth University)

We are looking forward to receiving proposals for 20-minute papers by **1st April 2022**. Proposals should consist of a title and short abstract (no more than 300 words) and a short bio (no more than 150 words, please). Please email these to Britcult2022@plus.ac.at.

We are hoping for a face-to-face conference, which will take place in Unipark Nonntal, an easy-access building right on the edge of Salzburg's Old Town.

For more information on the *Society for the Study of British Cultures* (*Britcult*) please visit www.britcult.de/.

Conference Organisers

Dorothea Flothow, Sarah Herbe, Markus Oppolzer and Elisabeth Schober

Department of English and American Studies, University of Salzburg, Erzabt-Klotz-Str. 1, A-5020 Salzburg, Britcult2022@plus.ac.at