

## Perspectives on Franco-British Relations

**Nigel Ritchie and Katherine Barrowman**

**Renaud Morieux** (Cambridge) discussed the notion of 'foreigners' in eighteenth century Britain and France. There were times when states could sharpen their distinctions, such as through the creation of the Alien office in Britain in the 1790s, but for the most part 'foreignness' varied across the eighteenth century. Certain social groups were welcomed across borders, depending upon their usefulness to the state. For example, English smugglers were given safe conducts by French and Flemish coastal authorities since they benefitted the coastal economies. There was more freedom in the eighteenth century since the state apparatus was weaker and local officials could decide nationality. These criteria changed over time, and the decisions were not always consistent. Morieux highlighted fishermen as a key case where the language of 'nation' and 'foreigner' could be blurred. Fishing truces between the fishermen of England and France, using the language of 'friends of all nations', showed how economic alliances could cross state boundaries. There were times when 'foreigner' could mean those outside the locality, with Normandy fishermen viewing those from Brittany as foreigners even though they were both French. Sometimes, fishermen argued that outsiders did not know how to preserve the environment they were fishing in, using a discourse of sustainability to justify their attitudes. Morieux finished his discussion by considering what made a foreigner, focusing on the public discourse of identities, as well as personal interactions which blurred the meaning of 'foreigner' in coastal communities.

**Christina de Bellaigue** (Oxford) spoke on "Femmes françaises and British gentlewomen: national character in the 19th century", in an exploration of fundamental differences in the respective experiences of womanhood. An early Cruickshank cartoon, "Le retour de Paris, or the niece presented to relations by her French governess" (1816), caricatured these differences through tangible signs of dress, language, and even choice of pet. However, while such choices might reflect relatively trivial national differences, disparities in the situation of married women posed a far more substantial example, with French women perceived as enjoying more freedom than their British counterpart. De Bellaigue attributed two inter-related factors to explain this: their respective legal status and participation in the workforce. Broadly speaking, British women, who were cut out of the family inheritance by primogeniture, lost their individual legal identity after marriage; whereas French women, who shared the family's partible inheritance, enjoyed a more contractual arrangement. However, as one questioner highlighted, such boundaries could be ambiguous, with newly enriched British manufacturing families commonly using partible inheritance. Even more significant was the greater cultural acceptance for French woman to earn their keep, alongside greater ease in raising credit and protecting their assets than their British counterparts. From 1800, 45% of Frenchwomen were in employment, with many continuing to work after marriage, motivated by low wages and high rents. French women of all classes could draw on a widespread industry of wet-nursing helping them to quickly return to the workforce. A major difference in cultural values was the reticence of many British 'gentlewoman' to either participate in or admit to profitable employment for fear of losing their social status and/or chance of a husband.

**Fabrice Bensimon** (Paris-Sorbonne) focused on French political exiles in nineteenth century Britain. Britain had a long tradition of welcoming refugees, from the Huguenots to the émigrés from the French Revolution. During the nineteenth century, Britain increasingly became a refuge for political migrants, particularly after 1848 when the continental backlash sent many revolutionaries to seek refuge on British shores. A strong culture of political liberty helped to create a public attitude that Britain should protect asylum seekers. Sometimes this became a point of contention, such as when France reached out to Britain following a bomb attempt on Napoleon III. The ensuring measures enacted by the British government to round up conspirators led to public uproar, with radicals exploiting the subsequent trial to reinforce the rhetoric around Britain as a safe-haven. A sense of British superiority to the 'despotic' regimes on the continent combined with a refusal to expel émigrés soon developed into the right for foreigners to claim asylum. While it was not the only nation to host refugees, there were several factors which made the refugee experience different in Britain. As a stronger power, Britain could resist geopolitical pressure to expel refugees more easily than countries such as Switzerland. Further, Britain had no state policy around the upkeep of émigrés, they tended to integrate into wider British society, rather than gathering into ghettos. By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain's attitude started to change, following the emigration of large numbers of European Jews into Britain. This saw a revision in British policy in 1905, placing greater controls on immigration, which limited Britain's role as a place of asylum.

During the panel discussion, chaired by **Claire Judde de Larivière** (Toulouse), the question of the usefulness of stereotypes was raised, their greatest value coming from an understanding of the context in which they are activated and the motives behind their promotion of particular cultural virtues. Morieux emphasised current focus on national representation erased many of the tensions in interactions between different nations and that reality was more complex, as his work on coastal communities had shown. While De Bellaigue and Bensimon agreed that practice was messier than perception, they argued that stereotypes could still affect interactions. This led to the question of whose perceptions were being studied, with all three speakers agreeing that many of these representations concerned the elite. De Bellaigue emphasised their role in shaping aspects of policy, such as the rejection of proposals to adopt French education practices in Britain as British and French children were perceived to be fundamentally different. Similarly, Bensimon highlighted interactions between the working classes and migrants, such as the reactions of the French workers against English workers in France during the economic problems of 1848. From the audience came the observation that there were many stereotypes at work, not just national, and that an important question was why particular stereotypes were employed at different times.