

## “Communities” – Proposition de communication F. Baillet

### Lines of nationhood

#### (Re)drawing the national community in the context of the 1867 Reform Act. The example of *The Tomahawk*.

At a time when contemporaries discussed the social order with “with unprecedented urgency, intensity and anxiety,”<sup>1</sup> in particular among the among middle-class groups, the Victorian periodical press played an active role in the shaping of class, gender and national identities. “Who was being brought within the pale of the constitution,” Hall, McClelland and Rendall remark in *Defining the Victorian Nation*, “was a particular man whose definition—the social, political and moral qualities he was thought to carry, his perceived relationship to processes of government and politics—was crucial to the redefinition of what the political nation was and might become”.<sup>2</sup> In the pages of *Punch*, *The Illustrated London News*, and later on *The Graphic* (1869), the British nation appeared as a collective construct, shaped by an imagined community of readers, critics, and artists brought together through the act of seeing, discussing and creating.

Edited by William A Beckett and largely illustrated by Matthew Somerville Morgan (1837-90), *The Tomahawk* was launched only a few months before the House of Lords agreed to pass Disraeli’s Reform Act (Aug. 15, 1867). Although favourable to a degree of extension of the franchise, the short-lived journal (1867-70) saw the admission of working men to the political process as a threat to the order of the Victorian social fabric, and expressed its distrust – and even fear - of the Reform League through several cartoons, among which ‘Vox Populi’ or ‘A Bully that Must be Put Down’ (7 December 1867).

This paper will examine *The Tomahawk*’s (re)drawing of the national community in this specific context, focusing in particular on the collective mapping out of social and political territories. Both inclusive and exclusive, the journal’s interpretive communities collectively but unevenly shaped a new brand of British citizenship. But beyond the networks structured by texts and images existed other systems of connections. Tracing Matt Morgan’s cartoons as well as A Beckett’s texts for *The Tomahawk* allows the researcher to uncover the width and scope of Victorian artistic and journalistic associations, a close-knit group with a distinct cast of mind, social and political.

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<sup>1</sup> Cannadine, David. *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993, 62.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, Catherine, McClelland, Keith and Jane Rendall. *Defining the Victorian Nation. Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*. Cambridge: CUP, 2000, 71.