Reading Stuart Hall: the influence of the New Left on social work

This article will discuss the work of the late cultural and political theorist Professor Stuart Hall (1932–2014). Hall made hugely significant contributions in cultural studies. In addition, he was one of the first thinkers on the Left to recognise the huge seismic shift that the electoral success of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 represented. Hall made a huge contribution to the development of progressive politics. His analysis of the centrality of race, empire and colonialism to the formation of modern Britain and its ongoing significance was a key element in the anti-racist politics of the 1970s and 1980s. These developments were very influential in the development of critical and radical social work perspectives. This article will argue that Hall's work provides a theoretical and conceptual toolkit for a radical analysis of contemporary politics and culture. Social workers, academics and other practitioners can use this toolkit to develop critical perspectives on social work practice and other aspects of social and welfare policies.

key words: Stuart Hall • social work

Introduction

As Hall emphasised that his personal story was an example of the connections

and contradictions that race, empire and colonialism produce (Hall, 2017), this

article begins with a brief outline of his life and academic career. The connections

between Britain and Jamaica are apparent in his full name: Stuart McPhail Hall.

He was born in 1932 in Jamaica, a British colony at that time. He attended

Jamaica College, an establishment modelled on the English public school. He

was a Rhodes Scholar at Merton College, Oxford (1951–57). Hall became a key

figure in British academic life. In addition, his numerous TV and radio appearances

and newspaper articles meant that he was a leading public intellectual. He was

certainly the leading black intellectual figure. He was one of the founders of the

New Left Review (NLR) in the early 1960s. He then helped to found the Centre

for Cultural Studies at Birmingham University with Richard Hoggart, author of

the influential The uses of literacy aspects of working class life (Hoggart, 2017). He

later became director of the centre.

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Theoretical perspectives

This article argues that Hall's work provides a conceptual approach to the analysis of

neoliberalism. In addition, Hall's work was among the first to anticipate the fracturing

of class alliances. He argued that the economic and social crises of the late 1970s

produced a new politics. Jaggi (2000) notes that Hall saw theory as a toolbox: it should

be used as a way of opening the exploration of topics and questions. Lewis (2000)

suggests that the way in which Hall is presented as primarily a theorist of race and

identity – that is, black people's experiences – has the unintended effect of minimising

his wider significance. This reflects the institutional racism of the academy. Hall is

concerned with much broader questions of identity and how they relate to politics.

One key aspect of the NLR perspective was that it was no longer possible to read

someone's political and other positions simply based on class.

Identity and race

The Jamaica of Hall's childhood was a society where the colour of one's skin was

'read' as a much broader marker of social status. Hall (2017) notes that identity is not

as fixed and transparent as was often presented; rather, cultural identities undergo

constant transformation. In his memoir, Hall argues that he did not become 'black'

until he moved to England. He uses this as an example of the way in which far from

identity being fixed, identities are not essentialist, but the result of the interplay

between historical, cultural and other powerful factors. In his work on representation, Hall (1989; 1997) outlined the construction of the colonial subject as the Other. This involves a literature of exploration – Columbus 'discovering' America – but also the exoticising of aboriginal cultures. Said (1978) highlights that the complexity of other cultures is flattened by the imperial project. Hall et al (2013) examine the way in which the post-colonial subject is represented as the cause of the problems of urban societies – poor housing, pressures on social and welfare services, and, ultimately, violent crime. The political and economic crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s were used by right-wing parties to fuel anti-immigrant sentiments. Hirsch (2018) shows the way in which these issues were exploited by Enoch Powell in the late 1960s. In Policing the crisis, Hall et al (2013) demonstrated the ways in which racialised representations of crime became ciphers for wider societal tensions.

One of the most important aspects of Hall's general theoretical approach is his insistence on the need to recognise the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural change. His work argues that there is a need for a recognition of the centrality of empire, slavery and colonialism as the foundation of modern Britain. Hall not only emphasised the fundamental role that slavery and colonialism played in the economic development of empire, but also explored the wider cultural impacts and the interconnectedness of Jamaica and Britain. One of the fundamental beliefs of anti-immigrant politicians, such as Powell, was that there was a period where Britain was all white (Alibhai-Brown, 2000; Hirsch, 2018) For the Powellite Right, the notion of a black British identity is an impossibility – British means white. Such ethno-nationalist beliefs have always been held by fascist groups but they have become more prominent in the post-Brexit discourse.

Hall was a key member of the inquiry team that produced the report The future

of multi-ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain

(Parekh, 2000). From a post-Brexit perspective, this appears very optimistic in its belief

in a multi-ethnic Britain. Hall was very fond of Gramsci's epigram 'pessimism of will,

optimism of intellect' (Gramsci and Hoare, 1971). One interpretation of this is that it

is important that we recognise that progress does occur but we must also be aware of

the barriers that remain, and that victories need to be protected. In a radio interview,

Hall noted that the 50th anniversary of the Windrush in 1998 had been a largely

positive celebration of the contribution that post-Second World War immigrants had

made to British life, particularly in one of its most loved institutions, the National

Health Service (NHS). The next year saw the publication of the Macpherson inquiry

(Macpherson, 1999) into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. The inquiry

concluded that the Metropolitan Police Service was institutionally racist. There is a

contradiction here: one event highlights the contribution of the African-Caribbean

community; the other focuses on the discrimination and racism that they face. For

Hall, it is important to recognise this and explore its origins:

I think the British have a future only if they can come to terms with the

fact that Britishness is not one thing and has never been one thing. There

have been a million different ways of being British and there have been a

million different struggles about Britishness which only retrospectively are

then smoothly accommodated into the story as if it's unfolding seamlessly

from beginning to end, but it isn't like that.

If you think of last year … first of all the celebration of the Windrush

Arrival, which is 50 years since the first post-war migrants. On the other hand

there is the MacPherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. And

it seems to me that Britain is facing these two possibilities as an alternative

future. I want the British to consciously move, in a more concerted and

open way, towards a more cosmopolitan idea of themselves. (BBC, 2000)

In his work, Hall argues that 'hybridity', as he terms it, is one of the key features and

impacts of globalisation. He is concerned with how these issues play out in cultural

and political settings. In the UK context, he argues that on a very personal level, the

answer to the question 'Where are you from?' increasingly involves a complex tale

of migration from Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. Hall (1996) argued that even

though race has no scientific base, it remains a powerful organising and categorising

influence. It clearly has profound implications. Hall (1996) concluded that race can

be understood in the same way as a language: it is a system of meaning. It is one that

has a real social, economic and political existence, with clear impacts on individuals

and communities. For example, in the 1970s in the UK, the term 'black' became

a political term. As a political term, it was used to include migrant communities

who shared experiences of colonialism, racism, discrimination and marginalisation.

Solomos (2014) argues that the importance of Hall's work in exploring 'new

ethnicities' lies in the fact that it involved exploring what it meant to be black. Hall's

exploration led to his challenging notions of what it means to be British. The result

was the recognition of a new identity: black British. This approach has been hugely

influential. For example, through the recounting of individual stories, Olusoga's

(2016) Black and British: A forgotten history shows that links between people of

African origin and the British Isles go back to the Roman Empire. In addition, work such

as that of the 2009–12 Legacies of British Slave-Ownership Project1 highlights

the way in which slavery was intertwined with all areas of British life. Mullen and

Newman (2018) concluded that the University of Glasgow benefited by between

£16.7 million and £198 million from slavery. In discussing the report, Newman

stated that:

The University of Glasgow is an institution that grew in a city tied to the

trade in tobacco, sugar and cotton, all of which were initially produced by

enslaved Africans. Launching an in-depth investigation to look at how the

university might have benefited from the profits of racial slavery was, in my

opinion, a brave decision. But it is a decision rooted in the core values of an

educational institution dedicated to the pursuit of truth and social justice.

(The Guardian, 2018)

Garrett (2012) notes that notions of ethnic authenticity based on white–black

binaries assume a white homogeneity that marginalises or ignores the experiences

of racism and discrimination of the Irish diaspora. In much of Hall's work, there is

a prophetic quality. In 1993, he wrote that 'the capacity to live with difference is, in

my view, the coming question of the 21st century' (Hall, 1993). He also suggested

that forms of ethnic purity remained as regressive features of late modernity. Hall

saw the dangers in national or cultural identities based on outmoded exclusionary

notions. The rise of Trump in the US and populist parties such as the Brexit Party

in the UK and others across Europe have proved that he was correct. Social work as

a profession and individual social workers are committed to progressive values. This

involves not only a rejection of reactionary populism, but also a positive celebration

of the value of diversity and difference. Hall's work is important here as it provides

a conceptual framework for analysis that undermines the myths on which populism

and nationalism are based.

Hall was influenced in the development of cultural studies by the Italian Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Hall used Gramsci and Hoare's, 1971 notion of hegemony as a way to examine how dominant political ideas and values are reproduced within cultural forms. Hegemony is a way of examining the complexities of modern politics. It does not exclude the use of traditional analytical approaches such as social structure and class; rather, it is an approach that requires the examination of the way in which ideas gain and maintain a foothold in debates. In addition, it questions how the ideas and values of elites are presented and reproduced as cultural norms of society. Hall's influence on cultural studies has been immense. For Hall, popular culture is not froth or some sort of safety valve; it is an area of intense ideological struggle and debate. The study of popular culture provides valuable insights into the wider social values of the period. For example, the period of neoliberalism has seen the rise of a celebrity culture and a cult of individualism. These values are reflected across popular TV, film and drama.

Hall uses the term 'conjuncture' as a way of capturing the fluidity of modern political, economic and cultural life, as well as the complexity of these relationships. This springs from the NLR's dissatisfaction with the limitations of a purely economic or class-based analysis. Conjuncture is simply a combination of events. This is an attempt by Hall to move away from the rigid economic determinism of Marxism. It suggests that any economic analysis can only provide a partial explanation. While an important factor, a purely economic explanation will miss significant factors.

The Brexit debate is an excellent example of a political phenomenon that requires a cultural as well as economic analysis. For example, O'Toole (2016; 2017) analyses Brexit as a form of what Gilroy (2005) termed 'postcolonial melancholia'.

Moral panics

Social work and individual social workers often find themselves caught up in moral panics (Butler and Drakeford, 2005). Policing the crisis (Hall et al, 2013) is a classic study of the way in which moral panics reflect wider social and political disquiet. Hall et al (2013) seek to explore how and why particular themes, including crime and other deviant acts, produce such a reaction. They argue that social and moral issues are much more likely to be the source of these panics. There are certain areas, for example, youth culture, drugs or lone parents, where there are recurring panics. Hall suggests that the panic is triggered by an event. He describes the ways in which these events cause 'public disquiet'. The response to this panic not only includes societal control mechanisms, such as the courts, but the media also becomes an important mediating agency between the state and the formation of public opinion. There have been a series of moral panics following the deaths of children. Jones (2014) shows the role that the media played in demonising social workers in the aftermath of the death of 'Baby P'. Warner (2015) highlights that politicians had a key, often inflammatory, role in the developing media coverage. David Cameron and Ed Balls both wrote emotive newspaper columns about the case. In these columns, both politicians made links between their own experiences as fathers and their disgust at the treatment inflicted on 'Baby P'. Of course, one does not have to be a parent to be repulsed by the neglect and abuse of a child. Cameron and Balls were doing this to side with 'ordinary' members of the public as opposed to the 'out-of-touch' social

workers who, in this narrative, had allowed these events to occur.

Neoliberalism and the strong state

Policing the crisis (Hall et al, 2013) is widely recognised as a classic of modern sociological thought. This study explores the development of a moral panic that focused on street robberies – muggings – in the mid-1970s. The media reporting of these crimes is examined. Hall et al's (2013) interest was initially triggered by the sentencing of a local youth to 20 years for such an offence. The reports of these crimes were racialised in the sense that the media presented mugging as a 'black crime'. Hall was working in Birmingham and the impact of Powell's 1968 'Rivers of blood' speech cast a long shadow (Hirsch, 2018). In his speech, Powell had claimed that one of his elderly constituents was trapped in her home because of the fear of being attacked by local black youths. In the speech, Powell suggested that unless immigration ended, and repatriation was considered, then there would inevitably be a race war in the UK. In his consideration of Hall, Simon (2014) notes that muggings were not the most pressing social or crime problem that communities faced in this period. This was a period that saw the advanced industrial economies entering a decade-long period of almost continuous recession and inflation. Alongside this, a period of deindustrialisation was underway that would see the UK economy become dominated by the financial services sector. This included a further shift of economic and political power to London and the south of the country (Simon, 2014). The early 1970s was a period of huge political turmoil in the UK, including industrial conflict, with miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974. The Conservative government led by Edward Heath introduced a three-day working week between December 1973 and February 1974 to protect energy supplies (Wheen, 2009). Furthermore, 1972 was the bloodiest year of the Troubles in Northern Ireland (McKittrick and McVea, 2001), with 479 people

killed and 4,876 injured.

The factors outlined earlier led Hall et al (2013) to argue that the state faced a crisis of legitimacy. 'Black crime' became a signifier used by the media and politicians to represent the social problems of what Hall and his colleagues termed 'urban colonies'. They used this term as a radical alternative to other phrases used at the time, such as 'ghetto' or 'inner city', which were also racially coded. The term also emphasised the links between Britain's imperial history and the economic and social circumstances of that time. Moral panics lead to calls for action. Violent crime tends to generate powerful support for state responses: more police officers, longer custodial sentences and harsher conditions in prisons. The folk devil of the urban crime moral panic of the early 1970s was black youth. Hall et al (2013) show the way in which the strong state uses 'law and order' policies to generate support from working-class and middle-class voters.

This study is remarkably prescient in that it describes the way in which the politics of law and order developed in the years following its publication. The criminal justice system (CJS) has historically been one of the key sites of social work interventions (Cummins, 2017). The rise of managerialism has marginalised social work approaches in the CJS. The focus is on risk and risk management (Garland, 2001; 2004). The 'othering' of other social groups – the poor, the marginalised, urban communities and minorities – is both a cause and an outcome of increased inequality. It is one of the key drivers of increased punitivism (Garland, 2001; 2004). Hall et al (2013) demonstrate that an expansion of the penal state is a key feature of New Right thinking. 'New Right' was a term used in that period to represent a combination of economic liberalism and social conservatism. It can be viewed as a forerunner of

neoliberalism, with which it shares many features. Wacquant (2008; 2009a; 2009b) has powerfully argued that the growth of social insecurity is one of the key features of neoliberalism. Wacquant argues that the rise of the penal state is an endogenous feature of neoliberalism. Penal and legal scholars such as Simon (2007), Harcourt (2011) and Drucker (2011) examine the expansion of the use of imprisonment via a broader cultural and policy lens. Wacquant uses the term 'doxa' to identify terms that construct but also limit the terms of policy debates. In the penal sphere, doxa would include phrases such as 'prison works', 'zero tolerance' and 'broken windows'. These terms, particularly in public discourse, are accepted in a largely uncritical fashion. Modern discourses of penal policy create an often racialised image of the offender as an alien – someone who is 'not one of us'.

Hall was one of the first to identify the implications of the shifting political and economic trends of the 1970s. In his path-breaking article 'The great moving right show', Hall (1979) saw that the mixture of economic liberalism and social conservatism that Mrs Thatcher represented was a new and influential political force. The article was published in January 1979 before Thatcher's election in May of that year. The post-war social-democratic settlement was unravelling at that point – most clearly in the Winter of Discontent (López, 2014). Hall's article in very prescient in that it recognised that Thatcherism (a term that he coined) had a popular appeal. He then goes on to outline the building blocks of its popular appeal. Thatcherism was able to position itself as representative of the 'ordinary' British citizen against the vested interests of the social-democratic welfare state, for example, radical trade unions and teachers. Social workers were also regarded as one of the groups using their position to impose progressive ideas and undermine traditional family values.

Hall recognised these moves as an attempt by the New Right to demonstrate that it was on the side of those who worked hard, paid taxes and so on. These processes also entail the othering of groups such as the poor, welfare claimants and offenders. These processes were racialised, as Policing the crisis (Hall et al, 2013) showed. Thatcherism combined some traditional Tory values with a commitment to radical solutions to the social, economic and political issues that had produced the crisis of the mid-1970s. Hall's work provides a superb analysis of these processes. In addition, he rightly points out that the experience of social welfare systems had become increasingly negative for many. The article is a warning to the Left that the failings in public services were fertile ground for those opposed to the notion of a welfare state. Hall was right in his view that Thatcherism marked a break from the post-war consensus. Mrs Thatcher developed a political image that was the antithesis of consensus, attacking what she saw as the nation's enemies within and without.

One productive way to analyse modern British politics is to see it in terms of a response to Thatcherism. Another wonderfully perceptive article, 'The great moving nowhere show' (Hall, 1998), was written when Blair and New Labour were at the height of their popularity. Hall notes that Blair is evidence of the success of the Thatcherite project in that 'Its aim was to transform the political landscape, irrevocably: to make us think in and speak its language as if there were no other' (Hall, 1998: 11). Hall notes that Blair's Third Way sought to combine two essentially incompatible political traditions: one is a tradition of social solidarity and social provision that seeks to protect against the excesses of the market; the other is one that sees market fundamentalism (Somers, 2008) as the effective means for the distribution of resources.

The Third Way is a 'politics without enemies'. He also notes that New Labour began

a process whereby the language of progressive social justice, rights and equality was

colonised by the Right (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Fraser, 2009). Hall (1998) was

very critical of what he termed New Labour's 'double shuffle', whereby it adopted

what he saw as the Thatcherite agenda of the marketisation of social welfare provision

– all under the banner of modernisation. 'Modernisation' is a term that can be viewed

as a doxa: it is always presented as a positive move – the alternative being a resistance

to change. However, the realities of modernisation and the implications for service

users and workers are pushed to the margins of debates.

Reading Hall for social work

The changes outlined earlier have had profound implications for the organisation

and delivery of social work across a range of areas. There has been a series of moves

to depoliticise the nature of social work and present it as a technocratic exercise.

The wider social work profession has often struggled to maintain a focus on values

and relational-based practice approaches (Cummins, 2018). The area of social work

education is a crucial site where these conflicts and tensions play out. For example, in

introducing the new social work degree in 2002, the then minister, Jacqui Smith, said

that 'Social work is a very practical job. It is about protecting people and changing

their lives, not about being able to give a fluent and theoretical explanation of why

they got into difficulties in the first place' (Brindle, 2002).

Although introduced by a Conservative and Liberal Democrat administration, the

Frontline scheme for social work training has many of the features of a classic New

Labour project. It presents itself as a modernising project and excludes the traditional

providers of social work education. It sees the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

as a vested interest. Frontline places the roots of the difficulties that social work faces

not in structural or organisational issues, but in the calibre of recruits and the quality

of university programmes. In 2010, McAllister et al (2010) drew on the Teach First

FastTrack training programme to inform their ideas for an alternative approach

to training social workers for child protection social work in the UK. These ideas

attracted unparalleled and cross-party support. Indeed, in 2013, McAllister addressed

an audience of social work practitioners and academics at the Joint Social Work

Education and Research Conference (JSWEC) conference and stated his intention

that Frontline would address endemic problems in child protection, which currently

failed children. Frontline was initially focused on recruiting the 'brightest and best',

defined by Frontline as graduates with a 2:1 from a Russell Group university. Murphy

(2016) critically explored Frontline and its elitism, noting that the scheme has its own

set of values to set it apart from the wider social work profession.

The key themes of Hall's work – race, identity and the nature and role of the

state – have profound implications for the social work profession and practice. Hall

is clearly committed to a progressive politics. There are overlaps here with the key

values of the social work profession. It was probably in the area of anti-racism that

Hall's work had most impact on social work. The development of anti-racist and

anti-oppressive practices in the 1980s can be directly traced back to the work of Hall

and later Gilroy. However, he is far too subtle a thinker to provide simple answers

to complex issues. This section will explore further ways in which Hall's approach

can be used to assist social workers as they grapple with the complexity of their role

and position.

Hall was concerned with issues of race and identity. In virtually all of his obituaries following his death in 2014, he was described as the 'godfather of multiculturalism' (Butler, 2014). As an ideal, multiculturalism had come under increasing pressure. In an interview on Newsnight following the riots of 2011, the right-wing historian David Starkey 'argued' that white working-class youths were adopting a violent Jamaican street culture, or, in his terms, 'the whites have become black'. In a speech in 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron argued that what he termed 'state multiculturalism' had failed:

We have failed to provide a vision of society [to young Muslims] to which

they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated segregated communities

behaving in ways that run counter to our values. All this leaves some young

Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and

believe in can lead them to extremist ideology.[2]

This is at odds with Hall's notion of multiculturalism, which is not a vision of segregation but of the dynamic mixing of cultures that produces new cultural forms. Hall saw this as an inspiring vision. His notion of hybridity is a recognition of this. He argued that in the modern world, we should be concerned with 'routes not roots'. What are the cultural stories and histories that have led to modern communities? Social work has clearly seen itself as being anti-racist. Its opponents often caricature social work as being obsessed with such issues. However, as Garrett (2012) notes, in its anti-racist stance, social work has often used the binary notions of an essentialist black–white divide that run counter to Hall's more dynamic and fluid notions of identity. Parekh's (2000) report explicitly rejected binary notions. However, Garrett (2012) notes that skin colour remains deeply

entrenched as the framing of 'diversity' or 'difference' and thus ignores the diversity of black communities.

Social work's professional commitment to anti-racism has been diluted. Anti-racism has been subsumed into a more general notion of anti-oppressive practice (AOP) (Dominelli, 2009) and later ideas such as cultural competency. This shift removes the radical core of an approach that would challenge institutionally racist practices. For example, in 2002, the General Social Care Council (GSCC, 2002) produced codes of practice that did not mention 'race', even though black Britons faced and continue to face discrimination. This discrimination is apparent in areas of social work provision, for example, in mental health (Keating and Robertson, 2004), the CJS (Fekete, 2018) and children and families services (Bernard and Gupta, 2006; Gupta and Featherstone, 2016). It should also be acknowledged that racism within social work education needs to be challenged more effectively (Fairclough et al, 2014). Williams (2011) argues that far from being a radical profession, social work has played a key role in the pathologising of difference. Social work has often deflected these criticisms onto other professions or institutions – psychiatry, the police, the CJS or schools – without questioning its own role and values.

Hall's insights form the basis of an analysis of the current politics of austerity. Brown (2015) noted that calls to individual sacrifice are an integral part of the discourse of the fiscal crisis as a national emergency. Hall (1979; 1998) argued that the language of 'national emergency' had been used by governments of all shades to attack the gains of working-class voters. This is exactly what austerity entails. Austerity was presented by its supporters as a technocratic exercise in

macroeconomic management. This cloaks the fundamental retooling of the

welfare state that it entailed (Goodman, 2018). The work of Emejulu and

Bassel (2015) demonstrates that austerity's impacts are racialised and gendered.

Austerity policies resulted in the UK public sector becoming the smallest

among major economies (Taylor-Gooby, 2012), including the US. This period of

retrenchment is the most sustained cutting of social provision that the modern

welfare state has faced (Taylor-Gooby, 2012). It went beyond what the Thatcher

governments of the 1980s had thought politically possible (Young, 2013). In

addition, Hall's conceptual toolkit can be used as the basis for the way in which

the mainstream media demonises the poor. Tyler (2008) outlines the dynamics

of new forms of classism. This is captured by the arrival of the figure of the term

'chav' – the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) word of the year in 2004. The

OED defines the term as an informal derogatory British term for 'a young lowerclass

person who displays brash and loutish behaviour and wears real or imitation

designer clothes'. Tyler shows that the emergence of the term reflects a shift in

class dynamics. The term effectively combines a series of earlier popular stereotypes

of the poor: the welfare scrounger, the petty criminal and the football hooligan.

Conclusion

Hall's academic work in the areas of cultural theory, race and racism, the construction

of national identities, and the importance of the media in framing debates around topics

such as crime has been profoundly influential on generations of thinkers. His major

works, such as Policing the crisis (Hall et al, 2003), Culture, media and language and The

politics of Thatcherism (Hall and Jacques, 1983), remain key texts for anyone who seeks

to

understand modern society and politics. For example, Paul Gilroy's There ain't no black in the Union Jack (Gilroy, 1987) and The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness

(Gilroy, 1993) show that the application of the cultural studies approach to contemporary questions of race and politics can provide illuminating insights into the construction of social identities. The optimism of Parekh's (2000) vision of a multiethnic Britain and new ethnicities may have rescinded. In the post-Brexit world, Hall's analysis of questions of national identity seem more, not less, relevant. This academic legacy would be enough to ensure Hall's position. However, it is important that we also acknowledge Hall's position as a public intellectual. The Stuart Hall project (Akomfrah, 2013) is a documentary that charts Hall's personal journey from colonial Jamaica to post-war Britain and his subsequent academic interests and career. The film uses a mixture of reportage, documentary clips and interviews to demonstrate the influence that Hall had. Hall's influence went far beyond the academy. As John Akomfrah noted in a statement released with the film:

Stuart Hall was a kind of rock star for us. For many of my generation in the

70s … he was one of the few people of colour we saw on television who

wasn't crooning, dancing or running. His very iconic presence on this public

of platforms suggested all manner of 'impossible feelings'.

Despite his iconic status, Hall appears to have remained committed to a genuinely collective approach to academic work and research. For example, Policing the crisis (Hall

et al, 2013) is an example of this commitment. This is something that is increasingly rare and difficult to sustain in the modern academic environment. While engaging with the insights of his work, we should also remember his support of colleagues.

In addition, he played an active role in progressive politics, challenging racism and neoliberalism's shredding of the social state. At the heart of his politics is a recognition of the legacy of colonialism but also a celebration of the new culture forms and identities that are being created – a celebration of difference.

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