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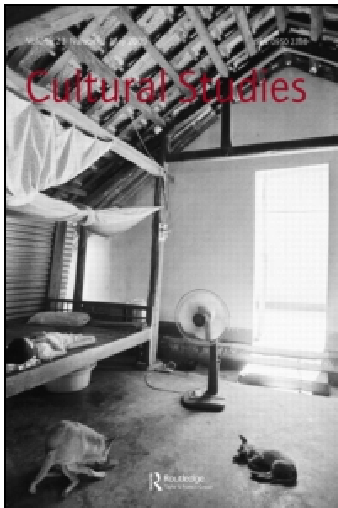

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BLACK BRITISH, BROWN BRITISH AND BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES

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Roxy Harris

BLACK BRITISH, BROWN BRITISH AND BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES

Caryl Phillips has queried the absence, in British fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, of black and brown people from the British Commonwealth who had migrated to the UK in highly significant numbers in this period. His lament echoes earlier observations by Paul Gilroy critiquing similar 'strategic silences' in the work of the widely recognized major figures in British Cultural Studies – Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. However, puzzlingly, Gilroy appears to exempt Stuart Hall from this critique, despite Hall's exceptionally close connections to the three others. This article argues that, rather than being a matter for recriminations against individuals, the 'strategic silences' are part of a long and deep tradition in the serious analysis of Anglo-British culture. It is further claimed that this tradition continued in a different way even after the entry of 'race' and ethnicity into British Cultural Studies, and even after its later anti-essentialist manifestation. It is suggested that, throughout, a marked reluctance to engage with ordinary black and brown Britons as agentive speaking subjects is discernible. There has been some progress in resolving these problems by aligning the rich theoretical legacy of Hall, Gilroy and others on 'race' and ethnicity, with careful empirical work centring black and brown people as thinking social actors. However, these developments have been limited and slow to appear.

Keywords Stuart Hall; race; ethnicity; British Cultural Studies; Black British; 'new ethnicities'

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'Strategic silences'

The introduction to an article by the writer Caryl Phillips in *The Guardian* newspaper (2004, Saturday Review section), states that, 'Britain became a multicultural society in the 1950s, but, with a couple of exceptions, white playwrights and novelists do not seem to have paid much attention'. Noting the explosion of new, and in its time radical, writing produced in that era by writers like Kingsley Amis, John Braine, John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Keith Waterhouse, and the accompanying massive immigration to Britain from Commonwealth countries, Phillips is further puzzled as to why, given, 'how radically the country changed its racial face during the 50s', this was

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something, 'that the vast majority of writers appeared to be incapable of either seeing, or reflecting upon'. As Phillips puts it, 'The "colour problem" was debated in parliament, on television, in newspapers, magazines, on the radio. It was the big story of the 50s. Yet where is it represented in the literature?' Again, Phillips wonders, 'the omission of black people from the literary landscape is so glaring it does beg questions about the politics of literary representation'. Phillips is concerned with literature and has his own particular arguments to make in that domain. Yet I want to argue that similar tendencies can be detected in the British Cultural Studies tradition which in their turn beg questions about the politics of *cultural* representation.

Gilroy ([1987] 1992), alluding to the phenomenon, referred to 'strategic silences'. This phrase is taken from a passage of trenchant criticism of Raymond Williams' late 1983 remarks on 'race' and nation. According to Gilroy, Williams' strategic silences on the configurations of what Gilroy terms the 'new racism' contributed 'directly to its strength and resilience' (Gilroy [1987] 1992, p. 50). Gilroy goes so far as to equate Williams' delineation of authentic and inauthentic forms of national belonging, with virtually identical formulations in the propositions of stalwart British right wing figures such as Enoch Powell[1] and Peregrine Worsthorne.[2] Gilroy is severe on Williams' failure to examine the historical relationship between racism and conceptualizations of Englishness/Britishness. As far as Gilroy could see,

> The image Williams has chosen to convey his grasp of 'race' and nation, that of a resentful English working man, intimidated by the alterity of his alien neighbours is, as we shall see below, redolent of other aspects of modern Conservative racism and nationalism.
>
> (Gilroy [1987] 1992, p. 51)

Gilroy subsequently (1996), extended this critique to other leading figures in the British Cultural Studies tradition – Hoggart and Thompson in addition to Williams. Gilroy, aligned himself with what he saw as attempts to, 'transcend the limits of the quietly nationalistic vision advanced by British cultural studies' imaginary founding fathers' (1996, p. 237). And yet Gilroy proceeds to deploy what looks like another strategic silence by appearing to exempt Stuart Hall from this general critique of leading foundational figures in British Cultural Studies. According to Gilroy,

> Thankfully these days, the writing of contemporary cultural history has become a less self-consciously ethnocentric affair than it was in the 1950s. Stuart Hall's uncompromising insistence that contrary to appearances, 'race' was an integral and absolutely internal feature of British political culture and national consciousness made a solid bridge not so much from scholarly nationalism to internationalism but toward a more open, global understanding of where Britain might be located in a decolonized and

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postimperial world defined by the Cold War. Hall's consistent political engagements with the identity-(re)producing actions of Britain's mass media allocated substantial space to the issue of racism and used it as a magnifying glass through which to consider the unfolding of authoritarian forms that masked their grim and joyless character with a variety of populist motifs.

(Gilroy 1996, p. 237)

Few people, surely, would dissent from giving credit and paying tribute to the immense contribution eventually made by Stuart Hall to the theorization of 'race' and ethnicity within British Cultural Studies and indeed much more widely. However, there is a remaining lacuna which requires examination and explanation. How might one account, contrary to Gilroy's deft separation, for Hall's intimate connection with Williams, Thompson and Hoggart within British Cultural Studies as well as personally and politically with Williams and Thompson, and his seeming acquiescence for a considerable period with the 'strategic silences' concerning the presence of black and brown people in Britain about which both Gilroy and Caryl Phillips have written?

Hall, himself is explicit in stating that under his directorship at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) the struggle to accord a significant and unconditional space for the analysis of 'race' in the CCCS's work was difficult, even bitter. A key ingredient in the conflict was the appearance at the Centre of protagonists for change who embodied the case they were expounding; that is, younger black and brown scholars. As Stuart Hall starkly puts it,

. . . getting cultural studies to put on its own agenda the critical questions of race, the politics of race, the resistance to racism, the critical questions of cultural politics, was itself a profound theoretical struggle, a struggle of which *Policing the Crisis*, was curiously, the first and very late example. It represented a decisive turn in my own theoretical and intellectual work, as well as in that of the Centre. Again, it was only accomplished as the result of a long and sometimes bitter – certainly bitterly contested – internal struggle against a resounding but unconscious silence. A struggle which continued in what has since come to be known as . . . one of the great seminal books of the Centre for Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*. In actuality, Paul Gilroy and the group of people who produced the book found it extremely difficult to create the necessary theoretical and political space in the Centre in which to work on the project.

(Hall 1992b, p. 283)

Hall's candour here is admirable. But why was it quite so difficult when he was the leading figure at the Centre?[3] I want to demonstrate (a) that Hall's relationships with Hoggart, Thompson and especially Williams were so close as

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to have afforded him every opportunity to enlighten them/struggle with them, about the insertion of 'race' and ethnicity into discussions about culture, cultural politics and radical socialist politics in Britain, (b) that the excision of black and brown Britons as social actors is not a matter of blame relating to individuals but part of a deeply ingrained tradition of considering British culture while ignoring the presence of black and brown people, (c) that this tradition was so powerful that it continued to exert an influence, in a different way, through a paucity of supporting empirical research, even after the vigorous and welcome intervention of young black and brown scholars at the CCCS, and subsequent brilliant and influential anti-essentialist theoretical contributions by Hall and Gilroy themselves along with others.

The post-1945 context for British Cultural Studies

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In developing this discussion, some contextualizing comments are necessary. Despite the dangers in periodizing history according to specific year boundaries, 1945 is a useful point of departure for two reasons. Firstly, the end of World War II marked a distinctive moment for black and brown people in the British Empire. Having, for the most part supported Britain during the war, they were no longer willing to return to pre-war subjugations and humiliations. In 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt had initiated The Atlantic Charter, a ringing declaration of the essential international requirement of democracy and human rights for all. In 1944 black and brown colonial subjects in London responded with a Charter for Coloured Peoples which they circulated worldwide demanding that the British state at least make good on its Atlantic Charter commitments (Ramdin 1987). The following year the historic 5th Pan-African Congress was held in Manchester to articulate a direct demand for colonial freedom (Adi & Sherwood 1995). This historical moment, it seems to me, represents a key transition point for the long established tradition in Britain of attempting to define Culture from the perspective of the tastes and practices of the white upper middle-class English 'gentleman'. This tradition, whose renowned and varied exponents included, for example, Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, the Reithian BBC, and T.S. Eliot,[4] had established a gendered and racialized stratification which placed black and brown colonized peoples as ethnic inferiors whose own tastes and practices could not be considered within the same cultural frame except for reasons of adverse comparison – a means by which Anglo-British ethnicity might seek to define itself. Even George Orwell, a compulsive writer on the nature of English ethnicity,[5] who placed himself on the political left found it difficult to escape this worldview,

> Wintringham said that even in Spain some of the Russian delegates tended to treat the Spaniards as 'natives', and would no doubt do likewise in

India. It's very hard not to, seeing that in practice the majority of Indians *are* inferior to Europeans and one can't help feeling this and, after a while, acting accordingly.

(Orwell [1942] 1970a, p. 474, original emphasis)

As suggested earlier, this dismissive tradition continued, albeit in a modified and more benign form, even in the work of pioneers of modern British Cultural Studies, Williams, Thompson and Hoggart, who, like Orwell, placed themselves on the political left.[6] In their different ways – Williams in his complex meditations on the nature of culture, Thompson in his insistence on the vital importance of the agency of social actors, and Hoggart in his demonstration of the value of the close study of the unspectacular cultural behaviour and tastes of ordinary people – they maintained the tradition.

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Williams, Thompson, Hoggart, Hall and the tradition of 'strategic silences'

Earlier it was argued that the habit of ignoring black and brown Britons in British Cultural Studies was a continuing tradition rather than attributable to the blameworthy practices of individuals. I want to ponder the behaviour of WIlliams, Thonpson, Hoggart and Hall in this respect and sketch what the public domain can tell us about their close interconnections. It is worth remembering here, Gilroy's observation that otherwise admirable and radical theorists of Anglo-British culture like Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson have a blind spot when it comes to analysing the relationship between Englishness as a cultural construct, and black and brown peoples who are British citizens or colonial subjects,

> The intellectual seam in which English cultural studies has positioned itself – through innovative work in the fields of social history and literary criticism – can be indicted here . . . a quiet cultural nationalism which pervades the work of some radical thinkers. This crypto-nationalism means that they are often disinclined to consider the cross catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics as a significant element in the formation and reproduction of English national identities.
>
> (Gilroy 1993, pp. 3–4)

Williams' 'strategic silences'

As mentioned earlier, Gilroy's original specific critique relates only to comments made by Williams in late writing which does not purport to be his

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major work. However, what I want to examine here, more closely, is the stance of a writer like Williams, who spent a lifetime excavating the meaning of English/British culture, towards the subjugation of black and brown people during, and especially after, the British Empire. The period covered by Raymond Williams' major publications was a period of intense legislative activity in Britain surrounding the technical definition of who was entitled to call themselves British. The British Nationality Act of 1948, for instance, established 'the notion of a common British citizenship for all members of the empire and dominions' (Goulbourne 1998, p. 51). Later, the 1971 Immigration Act sought to differentiate between different types of British citizen: British Dependent Territories citizen, a British National (Overseas), a British Overseas citizen, a British protected person and a British subject. Subsequently, the 1981 British Nationality Act 'reinforced the distinction between British Overseas subjects, who do not have rights of entry and residence in Britain, and United Kingdom citizens, who do have these rights' (Goulbourne 1998, p. 54). All of these contortions had at their root a deeply felt sense of the incompatibility between Englishness/Britishness and being black or brown skinned. One would expect any serious analyst of the notion of English/British culture, and particularly one placing himself as an unambiguous socialist, to have grappled with this aspect of the question in a sustained and subtle way. Close scrutiny of a very full Raymond Williams bibliography (O'Connor 1989) gives no hint that Williams addressed these issues in any significant way at all. This, in an era when questions of 'race', nation and belonging were being fiercely contested, both discursively, and on the streets. From the 1930s to the 1970s movements for colonial freedom agitated and sometimes fought for political, social and cultural independence from Britain. Internally, major upheavals regularly occurred (e.g. the Notting Hill Riots 1958, the infamous 'racist' Smethwick Parliamentary election 1964, the entry to the UK of British passport holding East African Asians 1966–1972, the Enoch Powell 'River Tiber foaming with much blood' speech 1968, the Notting Hill Carnival riots 1976, the Southall Riots 1979, the black-led urban insurrections 1981). The most reliable statistical evidence available is revealing on the estimated size and growth of the Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic populations in Great Britain, 1951–1991,

> In 1951, the combined Caribbean and South Asian population of Great Britain amounted to less than 80,000; by 1961 it had reached 500,000 or about 1 per cent of the total population; by 1971 it was about 1,500,000 (3 per cent) and by 1981 it was 2,200,000 or 4.1 per cent. The 1991 Census figure puts the ethnic minority population at just over 3,000,000 or 5.5 per cent of the total population.
>
> (Peach 1996, p. 8)

In short, then, on the face of it, one of the leading figures in British Cultural Studies, during the peak years of his deliberations on British culture, has little or nothing to say on the place of black or brown people within that culture. Why was this so? Are there any biographical clues, available in the public domain?

Williams, perhaps unusually for an academic writer, refers explicitly and repeatedly to his own Welsh childhood and upbringing as a principal source for his theoretical work on culture and society. One part of the general sensibility of that childhood was a routine racial mockery which was nevertheless unexceptional for the period. A childhood friend, Violet Trevett, recalls them being '... quite little, only 7 or so, with blackened faces and homemade toppers singing "we're three little curly-headed coons", and Jim [Williams] laughing like he couldn't stop' (Inglis 1998, p. 41). However, it is clear that Williams, as he grew up, was also attracted to a strong internationalist perspective. During the 1935 general election, Williams aged 14, determinedly heckled the Tory candidate, 'We had prepared figures for what black labourers in South Africa earned and we got up and asked him how he could justify them' (*New Left Review 1981*, p. 31). At the same time in a public debate on imperialism when he was 16, Williams' internationalism fully reflected the benevolent patronizing tone of the era, 'We must get at the native point of view because they do not always regard matters in the same light as we do. And they fail to see in what ways they are less civilized than we are ...' (Inglis 1998, p. 60). A peculiar omission given Williams' insistent and frequent reference to his Welsh roots and the centrality of the Welsh working class and labour movement, is his failure to mention what would surely have been a remarkable and inspiring event in the late 1930s – Paul Robeson's direct involvement with, and support for, the Welsh miners. In 1939 Robeson made a film *The Proud Valley* about the Welsh miners. Earlier, in 1938, together with 100 black people from Cardiff he had attended a meeting of 7,000 people in Mountain Ash commemorating 33 Welsh men who had died fighting for the International Brigade in Spain (Duberman 1991). But even more significantly for the present discussion, Robeson saw his own role in Britain as not involving simply the provision of concerts for workers, but as pioneering and foundational in the development of working-class culture here, 'I gave up two years of my time then – way back in 1936–37 – to help build workers' theatres in Great Britain to help develop a working class culture in the full meaning of that term' (Foner 1979, p. 14). I can find no reference in Williams' work to these episodes even though Williams repeatedly gives pride of place to his Welsh roots as a core element in the development of his analysis of British cultural and social identity (Williams 1983, pp. 196–197).

In fact on the question of 'race' in the construction of British cultural and social identity, Williams appears to have a persistent 'blindspot'. A remarkable passage in his exhaustive interviews with Perry Anderson, Anthony Barnett and Francis Mulhern of *New Left Review* is typical. The *New Left Review* interrogators

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take him to task for his approving writing in relation to Thomas Carlyle when compared to his treatment of other writers,

> In the case of Carlyle, you do criticize his later writings briefly, but you still conclude that his 'purposes' were 'positive and enobling' and that overall 'reverence' was his essential quality . . . In the case of Carlyle it seems incomprehensible that you could speak so unhesitatingly of 'reverence' as his essential quality. For Carlyle was an unbridled racist and imperialist . . . Even as early as the 1840s he was writing an essay on the 'Nigger Question'. No other writer in the book produced a prose as frightful as Carlyle on these occasions, which you do not mention . . . .
>
> (*New Left Review 1981*, pp. 103–104)

To this onslaught Williams merely replies enigmatically,

> Well, obviously there is truth in what you say. I would not want to claim that the balance is right. I don't think it is . . . If I were writing the book now, I don't think I would withdraw my judgment of Carlyle, although I would make it with different reference points.
>
> (*New Left Review 1981*, pp. 104–105)

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What is the observer to make of this kind of evasive response to a direct accusation of giving comfort to a racist position on the analysis of British culture? A sympathetic, but ultimately unconvincing, response might be to argue that on these questions Williams was merely a British man of his time (born 1921) and that it is anachronistic to expect anything else from him. What, though, of Gilroy's accusation of contemporary complicity with racially reactionary forces on the question of the legitimate cultural positioning of Britain's black and brown migrants and their British-born children? An alternative explanation of the relevant passages from the work which Gilroy cites, (Williams 1983), is difficult to construct. It could, for instance, be argued that such passages and discussions are rare in Williams' work on cultural analysis. Perhaps, too, his reticence on these topics shows that he is being a good progressive in not usurping the right of people from the visible ethnic minorities to write themselves into the cultural account of Britain. However, this latter perspective may well be disturbed by other, intriguing, aspects of the available evidence.

In this regard it is clear that Stuart Hall, who later produced highly influential analyses of the place of black and brown former colonials in the formation of the cultural identity of Britain, was not only a key figure in the formation and development of what has been called 'The First New Left' (Kenny 1995), but was also extremely close emotionally and intellectually to Raymond Williams. At Williams' funeral Hall is described variously as, 'at the centre of the occasion'; 'entirely sincere in [his] grief'; 'a lifelong associate of

the dead man'(Inglis 1998, pp. 9–10). Hall, himself confirmed the accuracy of this picture in two important ways. Firstly, in the closeness of his theoretical affinity with Williams' work,

> my own work in cultural studies has so often followed, and in many instances been guided by, those key points which mark out Williams's own development . . . apart from the influences which have naturally arisen in the course of working in closely cognate areas, there are several strategic points at which our careers have intersected. At very significant points in my own intellectual and political life, we have found ourselves shaping up to the same issues, or crises: and shaping up, if by no means in identical ways, then certainly from the same directions . . . His dispassionate wisdom and support sustained me through some of the rougher passages of the early *New Left Review*. In the depths of the recoil from the manifest taming and political defeat of the 1964–66 Labour government we found ourselves in the same room again, working on the draft of the statement which eventually became the *May Day Manifesto* . . . The fact is that in a broader, intellectual sense, I have often had the uncanny experience of beginning a line of thought or inquiry, only to find that, apparently coincidentally, he had not only been travelling much the same road but had given the issues a clearer, more forceful and clarifying formulation.
>
> (Hall 1989, pp. 54–55)

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Secondly, Hall is explicit in his affective identification with Williams,

> Though I myself came from a very different background, to Oxford not Cambridge, and a decade later – beginning of the 1950s rather than the 1940s – those stark sentences carried enormous reverberations for me. I still feel a strong sympathy for that way in which the bright young lad from the 'periphery', coming to Oxbridge as the idealized pinnacle of an *intellectual* path, first experiences the actual *social* shock of discovering that Oxbridge is not only the apex of official English intellectual culture, but the cultural centre of the class system. I know at once what Williams means by remarking, in his usual understated way, that 'the class stamp of Trinity was not difficult to spot'; and also that inevitable path which led, in the search for some kind of refuge, to the discovery of the Socialist Club – 'a home from home'. In the Oxford Socialist Club of a decade and a half later, there was also a moment when the Welsh, Scots and other 'colonials' took a look around the room and came to the startling conclusion that 'There is not an Englishman among us.' Williams arrived in Cambridge at the end of the 1930s as the bright 'scholarship boy' from the valleys. He records with feeling how that brash, radical certainty was

> constantly broken against the effortless assumption of superiority of the system: the sense, as he put it, that any critical statement he made could be immediately beached by a knowing reference to a comparative text he had not read; the sense of being 'continually found out in ignorance'; and being forced to look at himself, increasingly, with radical doubt. I still experience that indefinable sense of being absolutely placed and put down even today, whenever I cross the threshold between Oxford railway station and Broad Street, gateway to the 'dreaming spires'. In the light of these pages, I now know just what is meant by thinking of this as a 'colonial' experience.
>
> (Hall 1989, pp. 56–57)

So here, Stuart Hall, evidently one of the most highly respected, sure-footed academics in Britain, one who indeed has been a leader in his field, reveals that even in his late fifties, he felt 'absolutely placed and put down' by the Oxbridge milieu. Yet when we return to the earlier question of the relationship between Williams and Stuart Hall it becomes obvious that there is much more; a deeper reality. While there is ample evidence of Williams' influence on Hall and his work there is no evidence that the influence was reciprocal. Hall was plainly a full participant in Marxist analyses of class and culture in Britain, but Williams, in the peak years (1950s–1980s) of black and brown migration and settlement in Britain as a fraction of the working class, did not reciprocate. In the original example cited by Gilroy earlier, not only does Williams completely fail to embrace this fraction, but is distinctly unsympathetic to it, while going out of his way to be sympathetic to its opponents. Even in the high profile *May Day Manifesto* 1968 (Williams 1968), which was jointly edited by Williams, E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall, there is no mention even of the existence of this black and brown fraction of the British working class.

To sum up, then, there appears here to be an instance of the subordinate colonial periphery/dominant metropolitan centre syndrome. In this syndrome the person from the periphery sees himself/herself as an active participant and discussant in the world wide formation and dynamic developments in British cultural practices and mores. As Stuart Hall once put it, 'Having been prepared by the colonial education, I knew England from the inside' (reprinted in Morley & Chen 1996, p. 490). However, in response, the person from the metropolitan centre ignores or belittles these efforts. In other words, it appears that Hall, the Rhodes scholar from the colonies, participates fully in the debates on British culture with Williams and others but on *their* terms. Williams and others, important radical figures in the metropolitan centre, decline to engage with Hall and others of his origins on their distinctive perspectives, and simply behave as if such perspectives do not exist, or if they do, are of no importance with regard to any central questions; and we know that Hall *was* a participant elsewhere in vigorous debates about the symbiotic

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relationship between Britain and its Caribbean and other migrants and other newly ex-colonials concerning culture and identity (Walmsley 1992, Hall 2007, p. 274). To what extent, though, do these observations on Williams and the tenor of the Williams–Hall link, also apply to Thompson and Hoggart?

Thompson and Hoggart

The central thrust of the major work for which Thompson is best known, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968), as a work of relatively distant history (1780–1832), is beyond the scope of the present argument. It is worth noting, though, that in this foundational study which covers topics such as the liberty of 'the free-born Englishman', the part played by the Empire, the slaves, plantations, the East India Company and so on, is ignored. In strictly biographical terms Thompson is clearly identified with a campaigning anti-imperialism, 'My political consciousness cut its teeth on the causes of Spain and of Indian independence . . . and thence to "1956", Suez, Cyprus, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Chile' (Thompson 1978, p. iii). In addition he had, through his parents, who knew Gandhi and Nehru, a direct personal contact with the fight for Indian independence and with Indian culture (Soper 1993, Chun 1993). Thompson's failure to seriously encompass the existence and agency of black and brown ex-colonials within his analyses of English working-class culture is like Williams' omissions mentioned earlier, susceptible to either a benign or a somewhat negative interpretation. The benign view might mirror the apology he offers in the Preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*,

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> Finally, a note of apology to Scottish and Welsh readers. I have neglected these histories, not out of chauvinism, but out of respect. It is because class is a cultural as much as an economic formation that I have been cautious as to generalizing beyond English experience. (I have considered the Irish, not in Ireland, but as immigrants to England.)
>
> (Thompson 1968, pp. 13–14)

This is, in a sense, fair enough. However, one might ask why could he not, in his more contemporary work, have considered Caribbean people and Indians, at least as 'immigrants to England'? A hint of the more negative interpretation can be seen in the following ironic observation which Stuart Hall felt compelled to make in 1959 in a letter to Thompson after the latter's querying of Hall's mood in an earlier meeting,

> I am usually quiet not for any other reason than that I am usually quiet. Don't for goodness sake think it's because I'm disagreeing or bothered or

> depressed. The "happy West Indian" is a myth created by bourgeois imperialist writers to confuse socialists and the more advanced sections.
>
> (Kenny 1995, p. 35)

Whatever interpretation might be put on Hall's discomfort in this specific instance, there is little doubt that for Thompson, as for Williams, the cultural analysis of Britain involves strategic silences with regard to the place of black and brown British subjects in the national polity. Hoggart, in his own way, replicates this tendency.

The Uses of Literacy (1958), Hoggart's seminal text in British Cultural Studies is sharply clear about its objects, 'This book is about changes in working-class culture during the last thirty or forty years . . .' (Hoggart 1958, p. 9). At the same time the extent of its interest is extremely tightly circumscribed,

> The 'working-classes' described here live in districts such as Hunslet (Leeds), Ancoats (Manchester), Brightside and Attercliffe (Sheffield), and off the Hessle and Holderness Roads (Hull). My fullest experience is of those who live in the miles of smoking and huddled working-class houses in Leeds.
>
> (Hoggart 1958, p. 19)

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To this extent Hoggart's work is insulated from some of the concerns of the present argument. However, it is important to recall the demographic information mentioned earlier showing that during the decade in which *The Uses of Literacy* was written and published (1951–1961) the Caribbean and South Asian population of Britain increased seven-fold to 500,000 – about one per cent of the total population; and that this population was overwhelmingly located in the working-class areas of British towns and cities including Yorkshire addresses in towns such as Leeds and Bradford. Changes in working-class culture would surely include these changes. Hoggart, unlike Williams and Thompson, lays no claims to being a public Marxist or revolutionary in his analysis of culture; but follows them in the evident absence of 'race' as a significant factor in this analysis. Like Williams and Thompson he is also closely connected with Stuart Hall, whom he brought to Birmingham University as his deputy in 1964 after he had founded the CCCS there (Morley & Chen 1996, chapter 25).

So far Hall's origins as a colonial scholarship boy at Oxford University in the 1950s have been noted; so too, his intimate links with Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart; his central role in the formation of what has been called the first 'new left' in Britain (Chun 1993, Kenny 1995); and the beginnings of his pivotal role in the leadership of the Birmingham CCCS. The suggestion here is that in the process Stuart Hall was drawn into participation in a long, deep and consistent tradition in British Cultural Studies of deploying strategic silences concerning the presence and place of black and

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brown Britons within that culture. Of course critical voices might argue that the foregoing discussion is too focused on the biographical and the personal. This argument might well be persuasive were it not for Stuart Hall's own insistence, in recent years, that his response to questions of 'race' in British Cultural Studies might well have been conditioned by reasons which were *both* theoretical[7] *and* personal. On the one hand, he was preoccupied, with others, with questions of class and, in his case, operating from an independent marxist position connected with what has been described as 'cultural marxism' (Dworkin 1997). On the other hand, he makes it quite clear that his own activity in this milieu in Britain was prefigured by a psychologically bruising, and formative incident in his youth in Jamaica in which his sister was the victim of the racial 'shade' politics of colonial times. Briefly, she suffered a major nervous breakdown when Hall's parents would not allow her to have a relationship with a young student doctor on the grounds that he was black (i.e. too dark-skinned by the pernicious calibrations of the said 'shade politics'). As Hall puts it,

> In a way, I am able to write about it now because I'm at the end of a long journey. Gradually, I came to recognize I was a black West Indian, just like everybody else, I could relate to that, I could write from and out of that position. It has taken me a very long time, really, to be able to write in that way, personally. Previously, I was only able to write about it analytically. In that sense, it has taken me fifty years to come home. It wasn't so much that I had anything to conceal. It was the space I couldn't occupy, a space I had to learn to occupy.
>
> (Hall 1986, reprinted in Morley & Chen 1996, p. 489)

The importance that Hall attaches to these factors is underlined by his repetition of the racial incident in his sister's life on the celebrated BBC national radio programme Desert Island Discs in the year 2000.[8]

I want to now extend the discussion to consider some of the ways in which Hall removed the strategic silences on 'race' and ethnicity within the vibrant spaces he created, first at the Birmingham CCCS, and later at the Open University. Subsequently, I will advance the proposition that while Hall and his younger colleagues managed to remove the strategic silences, when black and brown people then entered the stage, they entered principally as textual objects for analysis rather than as agentive speaking subjects. Finally, I will indicate how Stuart Hall's theoretical work in relation to ethnicity has stimulated empirical work, including my own, in ways attempting to foreground the agency of black and brown Britons as conscious social actors.

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'Race' and the constraints of essentialism

As Stuart Hall makes clear earlier, once 'race' and ethnicity had forced its way onto the agenda at the Birmingham CCCS, *Policing the Crisis* (Hall *et al.* 1978), represented a decisive turn in [his] own theoretical and intellectual work. He also emphasized the importance of *The Empire Strikes Back* (CCCS 1982) and, I would add, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (Gilroy [1987] 1992), as seminal works in the emerging tradition. However, the new tradition bore traces and continuities of the former 'strategic silences', but in a new way. These books are infused with a potent sense of engagement and passion undoubtedly reflecting the influence at the centre for CCS of younger black scholars with a felt personal stake in their scholarship. And yet, the masterful analyses in these publications is textual, rather than actively empirical, and as such can appear uninterested in the speaking voices of specific *ordinary* racially and ethnically subordinated individuals; that is, those black and brown Britons *not* prominently involved in the fields of cultural production associated with what Gilroy terms 'black expressive cultures' (Gilroy [1987] 1992). In *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, Gilroy insists on recovering agency and historical perspective in any analysis of 'race', in order to combat the definition of blacks, 'as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behaviour in an active mode' (Gilroy [1987] 1992, p. 11).

Gilroy is adept at using memorable phraseology to encapsulate highly useful theoretical frameworks and this book is permeated by significant examples such as the aforementioned 'black expressive cultures', together with his characterizations of 'ethnic absolutism' and 'diaspora'. It is in this book that Gilroy begins to make bold theoretical moves in the direction of a strongly anti-essentialist stance with respect to the treatment of 'race' and ethnicity in British Cultural Studies. Despite the fact that Gilroy's work is limited to textual analysis rather than ethnographically informed empirical research, the development of these terminologies signalled a significant turn in the study and analysis of race and ethnicity in Britain. This is a turn which might be termed an 'anti-essentialist' turn in British Cultural Studies on 'race' and ethnicity. It is a development within which Stuart Hall, setting aside his self-confessed slow start on these matters, made an intervention which has been as valuable as it has been enduringly distinguished.

The anti-essentialist turn

The anti-essentialist treatment of 'race' and ethnicity within British Cultural Studies, then, marks a clear shift in Hall's thinking. How and when, briefly, did this shift occur? To begin with the most obvious change of focus was away

from the constant and explicit discussion of culture and society in Marxist terms, to a preoccupation with questions of ethnicity and identity, apparently outside this frame. This movement evidently took place after Hall's time at the CCCS and during his time at the Open University; that is some time after 1979, and most noticeably from the mid-1980s onwards. A sceptical observer claims to be able to date the end of the relationship between cultural studies and Marxism in Hall's thinking,

> We can date the end of the affair ... In the initial publicity for his keynote address to the April 1990 University of Illinois conference on 'Cultural Studies Now and in the Future', Stuart Hall was billed as speaking on 'The Marxist element in cultural studies'. In the event, the final printed version of the programme had him addressing 'Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies'. The published form of the paper carries the same title and is concerned to elaborate the proposition that: 'There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit' [Hall 1992b, p. 279]. Born in the aftermath of the student radicalism of 1968, Marxist cultural studies died with the collapse of the Soviet empire.
>
> (Sparks 1996, p. 72)

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Hall, himself claims that this process began at the CCCS and acted to decentre and dislocate its work and attributes this to '"the linguistic turn": the discovery of discursivity, of textuality' (Hall 1992b, p. 283). He argues that the CCCS made theoretical advances through successive encounters with structuralism, semiotics and poststructuralism. He attributes these excursions and openings to,

> ... the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgement of textuality and cultural power, of representation itself, as a site of power and regulation; of the symbolic as a source of identity.
>
> (Hall 1992b, p. 283)

One curious aspect of Hall's approach in the mid-1980s was that while he was prepared to state that he had learned much from the work of Foucault, he was much more circumspect about acknowledging the influence of postmodernist ideas and perspectives on his thought. At times his disavowal was sharp and explicit,

> ... I think Lyotard, and Baudrillard in his celebatory mode, really have gone right through the sound barrier. They are involved, not simply in identifying new trends and tendencies, new cultural configurations, but in learning to love them ... So we are caught between two unacceptable

> choices: Habermas's defensive position in relation to the old Enlightenment project and Lyotard's Euro-centred celebration of the postmodern collapse . . . I don't know that with 'postmodernism' we are dealing with something totally and fundamentally different from that break at the turn of the century . . . There are . . . now some very perplexing features to contemporary culture that certainly tend to outrun the critical and theoretical concepts generated in the early modernist period. We have, in that sense, to constantly update our theories and to be dealing with new experiences. I also accept that these changes may constitute new subject-positions and social identities for people. But I don't think there is any such absolutely novel and unified thing as *the* postmodern condition. It's another version of that historical amnesia characteristic of American culture – the tyranny of the New.
>
> (Hall 1986, reprinted in Morley & Chen 1996, pp. 131–133)

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Yet in perhaps his most comprehensive theoretical statement on the foundations of a position which allows discussion of identit*ies* and ethnicit*ies*, Hall is unambiguous about the compatibilities with classic postmodern philosophical formulations (Hall 1992a).[9] In this text he claims to be advancing arguments 'sympathetic to the claim that modern identities are being 'decentred'; that is dislocated or fragmented' (Hall 1992a, p. 274). Hall sets out three different conceptions of identity – the Enlightenment subject; the sociological subject; and the postmodern subject, and it is clear that it is the latter formulation which is closest to his own evolved position,

> This [the new more open-ended, variable and problematic process of identification] produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us (Hall, 1987). It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves (see Hall, 1990). The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.
>
> (Hall 1992a, p. 277)

In other places in the chapter from which this quotation is taken, Hall reiterates positions on 'hybridity', 'diaspora', 'globalization' and nations as 'imagined communities', as well as on 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity', which have become strikingly renowned and heavily cited. And yet despite this theoretical brilliance in creating a new tradition in British Cultural Studies, for authors like Hall, Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, ordinary black and brown individuals remain primarily as textual objects rather than speaking subjects.

The absence of black and brown speaking subjects

One of the most precise and perceptive commentators on the problem identified here is Angela McRobbie who detected it quite some time ago,

> [T]he problem in cultural studies today . . . is the absence of reference to real existing identities in the ethnographic sense. The identities being discussed . . . are textual or discursive identities. The site of identity formation in cultural studies remains implicitly in and through cultural commodities and texts rather than in and through the cultural practices of everyday life.
>
> (McRobbie 1992, p. 730)

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McRobbie's general critique is particularly sharply relevant when applied to the case of black and brown Britons, as I have previously observed (Harris 1996). Moreover, McRobbie's analysis is also helpful in marking out a direction which might help to transcend these problems. That is to say she makes,

> [a] plea for carrying out interactive research on groups and individuals who are more than just audiences for texts . . . it is necessary that we somehow move away from the binary opposition which still haunts cultural studies, that is, the distinction between text and lived experience, between media and reality, between culture and society. What is now required is a methodology, a new paradigm for conceptualising identity-in-culture, an ethnographic approach which takes as its starting point the relational interactive quality of everyday life and which brings a renewed rigor to this kind of work by integrating into it a keen sense of history and contingency.
>
> (McRobbie 1992, p. 730)

When McRobbie made these comments she was addressing identity in the widest sense, yet her observations are compellingly relevant to questions of 'race' and ethnicity. It could, though, be reasonably argued that there is no reason why leading theorists, like Hall, Gilroy and others, should also be expected to be leading participants in ethnographically grounded empirical

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research. However, it could also be plausibly argued that the power of their theoretical brilliance when aligned to their apparent lack of interest in ordinary speaking subjects may well have inhibited others from linking the theory to the ethnographic perspective. The question is also raised as to whether these limitations reflect a deeper discomfort in British Cultural Studies with the potential unruliness and disruptions of ordinary unspectacular speaking subjects, including black and brown ones, when compared with the relative orderliness and controllability afforded by text-related theoretical formulations alone. In other words, did what has become known as British Cultural Studies have at its heart, and transmitted from one era to another, a distrust of, and uneasiness with what Gary Fine has termed 'peopled ethnography'? (Fine 2003); and especially where black and brown people have been involved. I believe one example of a way of moving forward from this assumption and of taking up McRobbie's challenge, is to pursue the empirical realization of Stuart Hall's potent theoretical formulation – 'new ethnicities'. It is now possible to perceive perhaps the slow and hesitant emergence of the beginnings of a tradition of such ethnographically studies in Britain, and most significantly in this emergence, black and brown British scholars are prominent. However, as Claire Alexander and other contributors to a special issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* make clear, this development within ethnography has emerged from a troubled past, from which black scholars were mainly absent, and faces significant difficulties (Alexander 2006, pp. 397–410). In the decade or so preceding this special issue, some of the most promising ethnographic work in which black and brown people appear as agentive speaking subjects has been conducted from within a 'new ethnicities' theoretical paradigm, and Alexander's own work has been significant in this respect.

'New ethnicities' and ethnographically informed research

Les Back's (1996) book, is straightforward about its intellectual antecedents and is one of very few texts to unambiguously claim the phrase 'new ethnicities'.[10] It makes clear its indebtedness to Cultural Studies in general and the work of Hall, Gilroy and Mercer in particular, in attempting to construct a measured countering of cultural absolutism and essentialism. The sociolinguistic study produced by Rampton (1995) makes extensive reference to the influence of Gilroy's work on ethnic absolutism and the cultural inadequacy of unitary notions of Britishness. Gillespie (1995) refers heavily to the aspect of Hall's theoretical work which pluralizes terms like identity and ethnicity. She also makes it clear that she finds the thinking of Mercer and Gilroy helpful as she incorporates concepts such as diaspora and hybridity into the interpretive frame of her research. Alexander's work (1996, 2000) are studies of British youth of African Caribbean and South

Asian descent respectively which *do* draw substantially on these traditions of theory. The former boasts a foreword by Stuart Hall who acknowledges,

> Much of the debate that flows from the questions identified above [relating to 'black' identity in the British urban context] has been pursued on a very broad and general canvas – one that is too wide to capture the complex and subject interweaving of practices and meanings which now constitute the taking-on of this identity among young British 'black' people. Claire Alexander, however, has gone back to the detailed 'micro-physics' of power and meaning which alone offers a sufficiently fine-grained analysis to show the mechanisms of identity construction and 'performance' at work in all the rich detail we require if these more abstract theoretical questions are to be adequately addressed.
>
> (Hall 1996, p. vi)

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In her later text (Alexander 2000), Alexander states her intention to 'challenge monodimensional, essentialist accounts of Asian youth identities' (Alexander 2000, p. 23). Sewell (1997) in his study of boys of African Caribbean descent does mention this theoretical perspective of Hall and others, but is hesitant and in the end not entirely clear as to the extent to which he embraces its relevance to his concerns. A more recent author who is explicit in trying to make the anti-essentialist 'new ethnicities' theory of Hall and Gilroy work empirically is Tate (2005), albeit like Rampton, drawing on sociolinguistics for her analysis. While not exhaustive these studies represent most of what is available in the UK, notwithstanding additional signs in unpublished work (see Pang 1999, Desai 2000, Dudrah 2001, for examples). As suggested earlier, the empirical texts listed in this section would appear to represent offerings which are both relatively meagre and late given a mass presence in Britain of black and brown citizens which now spans a period of over half a century. However, it would be misleading to close this paper without giving a brief indication of the very significant extent to which Hall's theorizations of 'race' and ethnicity within a British Cultural Studies tradition which he refashioned and nurtured, have served as an indispensible inspiration to my own attempts at ethnographically informed work with black and brown agentive speaking subjects.[11]

Theory and ethnographically informed research: a personal note

While I have long followed closely Stuart Hall's sophisticated theoretical treatments of 'race' and ethnicity in Britain, two formulations have been especially exciting as an encouragement to take on the difficult task of bringing

the theory into empirically realized detail. The first formulation – 'new ethnicities' – was particularly liberating, in terms of research fieldwork, in declaring the, 'end of innocence', or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject" (Hall 1988, p. 254). The second, embraced issues of diaspora and 'cultures of hybridity' (Hall 1992a). Together, they assisted me in engaging in empirical research which enabled interventions in disciplinary areas (applied linguistics and sociolinguistics) outside cultural studies/sociology. There, the penetrating theoretical power of work concerning 'race' and ethnicity emanating from British Cultural Studies, and inspired by Stuart Hall, appeared to be little known. In turn, the case for cultural studies/sociology needing to pay some attention to questions of language when analysing 'race', ethnicity, disapora, identity and culture, could be made (see Harris 1997, Leung *et al.* 1997, Harris 1999, Harris *et al.* 2002, Harris 2006, for the salience of these arguments). However, here, very briefly I want to give an indication of how productive Hall's theory has been in relation to the empirical work represented in my monograph *New Ethnicities and Language Use* (Harris 2006). First of all with his influential 'new ethnicities' intervention in 1988, Hall offered those of us involved in anti-racist activism, but very aware of the damaging reductionism of some of its elements (Gilroy [1987] 1992), an energizing jolt with his succinct and penetrating observations such as,

> [It also] marks what I can only call the 'end of innocence', or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject . . . . What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experiences of black subjects . . . Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject you are plunged headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism. You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject the new essentially good black subject . . . .
>
> (Hall 1988, p. 254)

The prospect of researching ethnicities without 'guarantees' was helpful, indeed liberating, for someone wanting to conduct research employing an ethnographic perspective. Using the earlier theoretical framework I was able to research the ethnicities of the *Blackhill Youth*, a group of 30 young people of

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South Asian descent in London.[12] Here there is space to offer just two small illustrative examples, of how these kinds of theoretical orientation influenced my perspective in 'the field'. The first example relates to 'new ethnicities', the second to 'cultures of hybridity'.

New ethnicities

Most of the literature I had read about the popular cultural tastes of young people of South Asian descent in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s had emphasized their attachment to Bhangra music. So I was, for a while, somewhat irritated to hear from one young person after another that, while they had nothing against bhangra, their preferred musical tastes embraced styles such as 'grunge', 'rock, 'heavy metal', 'pop', 'rap'/'hip hop', 'acid jazz', 'r&b', and so on. The 'new ethnicities' formulation assisted me in rebalancing my initial response to data which at first sight appeared inconvenient with respect to previous textual representations of this group of young people. I was able to arrive at an interpretation recognizing that the musical tastes of these young people were representative of the tastes of other *British* youth of their generation in the late 1990s, *not* of the imagined and guaranteed tastes of some sort of essential South Asian ethnicity. Hall has been disarmingly modest and free of proprietorial hubris about his theoretical contributions concerning race/ethnicities, encouraging other scholars to expand and test them empirically as his generous Foreword to Alexander's 1996 research monograph *The Art of Being Black* made clear. Another instance that I was able to utilize came in his theorization of the conditions of diasporic existence of Britain's black and brown minorities in terms of 'cultures of hybridity', which also invited further ethnographically executed empirical research.

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Cultures of hybridity

Hall suggested that Britain's black and brown populations engage in a continual process of *translation* which,

> describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped.

> The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and to no one particular 'home'). People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated* . . . They are the products of the new *diasporas* created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered.
>
> (Hall 1992a, p. 310)

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For me, this conceptualization proved to be extremely useful in characterizing the type of social formation that seemed to emerge from the ways in which the Blackhill Youth represented their everyday lives in London during my fieldwork with them. These representations involved a marked local London rootedness *combined with* continuing affiliations and links with a global diaspora.

These are two necessarily truncated illustrations of how 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' theory assisted my empirical research. However, Hall's approach to theory in these areas insists on the value of theory in assisting the process of working through to a better understanding of real world problems – rather than the proferring of theory for its own sake (Hall 2007, p. 207). Each consideration of what he calls 'the present conjuncture' implies an extension or reshaping of theory. One attempt I made to achieve such an extension arose in relation to the promise of 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' theory to emphasize plurality, hybridity and fluidity. These theorizations managed substantially, but not entirely, to account for the interpretations that my research data impelled. The Blackhill Youth characterized their ethnicities in ways which appeared to be more complex that these two theoretical orientations allowed. I came to realize that despite their rhetorical evocations 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' did not entirely, as claimed, transcend binary conceptualizations.

Extensions to theory arising from 'the field'

The introduction of 'new ethnicities' seemed to imply new dichotomies – between the *old* and the *new*. This impression was reinforced by 'Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities', the title of a later influential paper produced by Hall (1991). Here there is an evident binary metaphor suggesting clear boundaries and a negotiation between two distinct entities. A similar effect can also be seen in the penultimate sentence of the 'cultures of hybridity' quotation (see earlier) which explicitly discusses '*two* identities' and '*two*

cultural languages'. The ethnicities of the Blackhill Youth were not expressed dichotomously, but rather were enacted through multifarious practices integrated into the flow of their everyday lives. All the elements including the old and the new were constantly co-present as available resources to be emphasized or backgrounded according to the requirements generated by contexts, circumstances and social interlocuters. My way of extending theory in the light of my empirical data, and transcending the binary metaphor, was to draw on Raymond Williams' suggestion that culture could be perceived in terms of the articulation of the *residual* with the *dominant* and the *emergent*. Despite the obvious difficulties involved, Williams urges that the cultural analyst must both identify these as separate elements and yet understand that in lived experience they operate syncretically,

> The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant-culture, from that active manifestation of the residual (this being its distinction from the archaic) which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture . . . By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense 'species specific') and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel.
>
> (Williams 1977, pp. 122–123)

Space does not permit a fuller account, here, of how I applied these theoretical perspectives to the interpretation of the Blackhill Youth research data (see Harris 2006, chapter 4). However, my abbreviated comments should be sufficient to give a sense of how Hall's theorizations of ethnicity have the capacity to stimulate ethnographically inclined research, and assist its conception and execution while being open enough to generate elaborations arising through the interpretive process involving the resultant empirical data.

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Conclusion

This article began with a pointed query by Caryl Phillips concerning the absence of black and brown Britons from landmark British fiction from the 1950s onwards. Phillips' observations mirror those made by Gilroy with respect to the Anglo-British cultural studies of the same era led by figures like Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart. However, in exempting Stuart Hall from his critique, Gilroy masks a tendency in British Cultural Studies, whose effects have perhaps been much deeper than might have at first been apparent. While scholars such as Gilroy himself, Hall and others eventually managed to insert the penetrating and sophisticated study of 'race' and ethnicity into cultural studies, its circumscription to the realm of theory, has had an unfortunate continuing effect. It further postponed the appearance of the lived everyday experience of ordinary black and brown people and their own perspectives on this experience, at the centre of the frame.

At a conference held in Hall's honour at the University of the West Indies the quality of self-deprecation about his theoretical work and openness to empirical developments arising from it, was captured in the following extracts from comments made by Hall indicating that his approach to theory was shaped by his conceptualization of,

> a world of many determinations, where the attempts to explain and understand are open and never ending – because the historical reality to be explained has no known or determined end. Well, some of the things that people have remarked on in my work arise from this method of thinking, which I am only addressing because you selected the absurd notion of spending two days thinking about the thought of Stuart Hall! . . . The question of the contingency of the history of the present is critically important because this is what I want to say about the present – that it is the product of 'many determinations' but that it remains an open horizon, fundamentally unresolved, and in that sense open to the 'play of contingency'.
>
> (Hall 2007, pp. 278–279)

It is to be hoped that a new generation of black and brown British scholars will take up this challenge, inspired by Stuart Hall's fertile theoretical example, to produce a tradition of ethnographically informed analyses which will reinvigorate the study of 'race' and ethnicity within British Cultural Studies. My own ethnographically informed research has certainly been stimulated by this challenge.

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Notes

1 A leading Conservative Party politician who rose to notoriety in the 1960s and 1970s as the hero of right wing racist currents who admired him for his outspoken opposition to the presence and continuing inward migration of black and Asian people.

2 Veteran journalist (b. 1923) who was once editor of the British national broadsheet newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph*.

3 Hall, himself has strongly hinted that the difficulties were personal and psychic as well as intellectual and political: 'It has taken a very long time, really, to be able to write in that way, personally. Previously, I was only able to write about it analytically. In that sense, it has taken me fifty years to come home. It wasn't so much that I had anything to conceal. It was the space I couldn't occupy, a space I had to learn to occupy' (reprinted in Morley & Chen 1996, p. 489).

4 The deliberations of all these individuals on English culture are dominated by deep anxieties about class relations and the potential displacement of bourgeois 'high' culture by working class 'low' culture and by extension a reduction in the quality and worldwide influence of English culture. The argument here is that these individuals completed their meditations on the nature of English culture at a time when Britain administered a worldwide empire whose black and brown people could travel only with documents marking them as British colonial subjects and as such must have been worthy of note in relation to these definitions of culture; it is not claimed that those named earlier are representatives of reactionary circles in England. On the contrary, in the context of their time they could be seen as, for the most part, cultural commentators with serious humane impulses. What is being suggested here is that with regard to the colonized peoples of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean they typically deployed discursive strategies of ignoring or belittling. For some exemplification see Arnold's 'Sweetness and Light' (1869) cited in Munns and Rajan (1995), p. 26), Leavis (1943, p. 143), Reith cited in Scannell and Cardiff (1991, pp. 7, 10), Briggs (1985, p. 138) and Eliot (1948, pp. 13, 63, 91).

5 Overwhelmingly Orwell's writing on the subject is labelled as being about the English, rather than the British, and would lead the reader to infer that he conflates the terms.

6 Interestingly, Orwell, unlike the others displayed a sharp reflexivity in his writing on the particularities of English culture (Orwell [1943]/1944] 1970, Orwell [1942] 1970b). Specifically, he was brutal and clear eyed about the basis of English imperial culture, 'What we always forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa . . . One gets some idea of the real relationship of England and India when one reflects that the per capita annual income in England is something over £80, and in India about £7. It is quite common for an Indian coolie's leg to be thinner than the average Englishman's arm. And there is nothing racial in this, for well-fed members of the same races are of normal

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physique; it is due to simple starvation. This is the system we all live on and which we denounce when there seems to be no danger of its being altered' (Orwell [1939] 1970, p. 437).

7 Theoretically it is very important in the twenty-first century not to underplay the extent to which, in the latter half of the twentieth century, a politics based on racial and ethnic particularism was seen by people on the left as inimical to liberation and progress for subordinate groups. In this conceptualization, the emphasis of the left on class perspectives was seen as the foundation of a progressive universalism, whereas an emphasis on race/ethnicity was characterized as divisive and potentially regressive. Hobsbawm (1996) provides a particularly trenchant summation of this position.

8 Desert Island Discs is a famous and long-running programme on the BBC's national radio station Radio 4. Guests on the programme are invited to choose the eight records they would take with them to a desert island. In between the playing of their choices guests review their lives in conversation with the presenter. Stuart Hall appeared on the programme on Sunday 13 February 2000.

9 Unusually for such a formidable and influential theorist, Stuart Hall has produced no monograph encapsulating his arguments and positions. His oeuvre is scattered across a multitude of interviews, discussions, conference speeches and papers as well as co-authored book chapters. The text cited here is a major contribution to a text book for an Open University course 'Understanding Modern Societies'.

10 Ali (2003) and Harris (2006) represent other examples. Hall's 'New Ethnicities' theoretical formulation remains one of the most influential anti-essentialist formulations on 'race' and ethnicity to have emerged from the British Cultural Studies tradition and its reach has extended far beyond this sphere. Also Hewitt's (1986) *White Talk Black Talk* while predating 'new ethnicities' seems to me an exemplary instance of what an ethnographically informed study in this tradition should be like. Ifekwunigwe (1999) is another text outside an explicit 'new ethnicities' framework which might be added to a collection building a new tradition.

11 In this refashioned British Cultural Studies tradition the work of scholars nurtured by Hall, especially the scholarship of Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, has also been very important.

12 This focus, incidentally, contradicted the critique that Hall's theorizations were limited to matters of concern to 'Black' rather than 'Asian' Britons. In the British context 'South Asian' refers to people who have migrated from former colonies in the Indian subcontinent (e.g. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), and others in their global diaspora.

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