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Reading the Crisis episode three: 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' with Gail Lewis & Roderick Ferguson

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Aasiya Lodhi

Hello and thank you for joining us. If you've not been with us for this series before, let me introduce myself. I'm Aasiya Lodhi, a trustee of the Stuart Hall Foundation and a Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster. I'm so pleased to welcome you all to the third and final event of the Foundation's conversation series, Reading the Crisis, part of our 2024 programme, Catastrophe and Emergence.

Catastrophes no doubt signal a crisis of survival, knowledge and power, but we also know they can herald renewal, political closures and openings, the demise of old ways of knowing and the emergence of new ways to relate to our ever-changing world. Against that backdrop, this conversation series asks us to think about what kinds of tools and strategies we need for the moment, and for some of the many crises we currently face.

From attacks on protest, to the deepening of austerity, to the horrors unleashed on Gaza, the defence of confected culture wars and the slow creep of diversity optics, a topic I suspect we'll be discussing later on today. These all come together to form what we could argue is a snapshot of our conjuncture, that rich and yet knotty term so powerfully used by Stuart Hall.

In today's conversation we're turning to his 1990 essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'. Like the two previous essays we've examined in this series, Hall's ideas speak of course of the time in which they were written, in this case the changing ways diasporic cultures were being represented and conceptualised more than 30 years ago.

And yet there are important aspects of Hall's essay on difference and on the meanings of culture that stretch over the past three decades to resonate strongly with us now.

We'll be hearing more on that today from two eminent thinkers who've grappled with culture, identity and with Hall's work over a long period of time, and I'll introduce them both shortly.

But again, as we said last time, we hope you were able to read this essay and that you're sharing the conversation. Our speakers will be in dialogue for about 45 minutes and then we'll turn to your questions in the second half. Please submit any questions or comments using the Q&A box at any point, and we'll try to get to as many as we can. Automated live captions are available by clicking the CC button. There'll also be a video recording of this conversation in due course.

But now let's welcome our guests. Gail Lewis is Visiting Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Yale University, as well as Reader Emerita in the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck University of London. Gail worked with Stuart Hall at the Open University for some time and co-authored with him a submission on racial stereotyping for the Macpherson Inquiry into the killing of Black British teenager, Stephen Lawrence. In her own words, and I quote, Gail has written but is trying to become a writer. Gail likes to speak but is still seeking her tonalities. Gail sometimes feels lonely, inept and scared. But Gail is brought into being in and by the company, care and joy of Black and/or women of colour feminisms and queer knowings and livings.

Roderick A. Fergson is the William Robertson Coe Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and American Studies at Yale University. He's the author of One-Dimensional Queer, We Demand: The University and Student Protests, The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference, and Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique. Roderick is also co-editor with Grace Hong of Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization, and of Keywords for African American Studies with Erica Edwards and Jeffrey Ogbar. He was the recipient of the Kessler Award from the Centre for LGBTQ Studies in 2020.

Welcome to you both. It's wonderful to have you here. Gail, I wondered if I could begin with you, given your very long engagement with Hall and his work, which I sort of alluded to earlier in the introduction. At the broadest level, it seems to me that Hall is arguing here that in this essay, that cultural identity, especially in its diasporic formations, is not something that sits outside of representation. Representation is not in the title, but it's a key theme of this essay. But it's made within representation, if you like. And he's writing specifically at the start of the essay about a "Third Cinema", he calls it, that's visual representations of Afro-Caribbean and Asian diasporas in the West. How important do you think that identification of that relationship between cultural identity and representation was at the time?

Gail Lewis

Thank you for the introduction. Thank you for inviting me to be in this conversation. And hello to everybody out there who I can't see, but welcome. I think it was crucial. I think it was absolutely crucial at the time. If we do go back and try to think about, you know, 1990, in a sense, when the essay was published, we'd come through, in the UK, a long period of sustained attack on modes of social life, on class-based politics, on racialised minority, minoritised groups across the society. And there was a whole breakdown, really, led by the Thatcherite "Revolution" of the old kind of social democratic, post-Second World War social contract, in which there was already an imagination of how we were tied together as people, citizens, and others in the United Kingdom. And that was, with all its problems of that moment of the social contract, that was being radically, radically erased through the Thatcherite project for the emergence of what Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey called, you know, the neoliberal, the emergence of neoliberalism in the UK.

The context of that, of course, was that there'd been lots and lots of protest, by class-based and racialised oppositions to the policing, the ever-more tyrannical policing and governance of the social fabric, in that sense, including the miners' strike, of course, which was a kind of, in a sense, symbolic, I think, of the last defeat of class-based strength at that point, but also very much in terms of the black and Asian communities really being mobilised in all sorts of ways to oppose the police and to oppose the ways in which communities were governed.

Central to that moment, I think, was the emergence of a kind of what was called Black British cinema, you know, and the whole production, really, of the black arts movement that was building up in the '80s, and that was offering us other ways in which to imagine and experience ourselves as racialised minorities in a context where we were still deemed as immigrants, although we were beginning to be called, you know, ethnic minorities, etc. and that kind of stuff. We were still positioned as outsiders.

And how do we imagine ourselves, especially as a younger generation, you know, at a point where it was our parents who had moved, and we were so-called the second generation, how could we imagine ourselves and experience ourselves, both in terms of our own groups of identity and across racialised groups? So the ways in which we'd organise under the sign black to convene a whole set of racialised populations.

And what this essay does, I think, is intervene into that moment. It is an example, I think, of Stuart's attempt at conjunctural analysis to understand the specificities of the now and the ways in which political, economic, social, and cultural forces come together in their specificity in a particular moment. What is the conjuncture? What's the shape? In a sense, what's the intersection, in one way of thinking about it? But what's that configuration look like? And what's therefore, possible, what becomes possible, how to

imagine ourselves? And Stuart, in this essay, is intervening and saying, look, we need to understand that identities are always in process of becoming, and they're contained, or they're produced with, they're productions, they're productions, in particular contexts.

And this was an intervention that said, let's think about what makes it possible. He uses Jamaica as the example in terms of black, but we could carry that over. What made it possible for us for a while to organise under a sign called black that wasn't only about Africa diaspora people? What made it possible? And how did we live and experience our identities in that? Now, my own view is that that was particularly held by, that position was held by black feminisms, that held that version, that sign together as a sign of organisation in a way that was more sustained than in other areas. But the black arts movement was doing that too, I think.

So it was a crucial intervention because it helped us to understand ourselves but it also helped us to think, ah, we can go on, keep on changing and becoming other than which we know. We're not going back to some essentialised, but lost and hidden identity that was given by nature almost. So I think, and representation was crucial for that, of course, because it's in representation.

Aasiya Lodhi

Absolutely. Thank you. That was a very expansive and very detailed answer. I have lots of things I want to come back to, including your touching there on political blackness and the United Kingdom and on its relationship to feminism here. But Roderick, can I just bring you in, obviously in the American context, I wondered if perhaps you could expand on some of those points that Gail has made about the uses and the limitations of imagination in relation to what Hall says in this essay, because he sees cultural identity as positioned and enunciated.

He describes it as such in the essay. And he says, identity is not, as Gail has just said, a fixed essence, but neither is it purely imagined, right? And rather, he views it as forged in, he says, the material and symbolic shaping of its past. But, you know, to go further, to articulate a contemporary political position. So I wondered how that, you know, speaks to you in the American context, either in the '90s or in the decades since.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah, thanks for having me. And hello to everyone. It's wonderful to be here. One of the main arguments of the piece is precisely that. It's kind of what Gail was saying, that cultural identity is not given to us by nature. It is part of political struggles. It's part of, you know, sort of political cultural representations, which means that it can be

rewritten, and it can be written, and it can also be rewritten, right? And when I think of the '90s, that's exactly how I think of the '90s.

I began the '90s as an undergraduate at Howard University. It was the moment where black independent cinema was still very much alive, right? And so I remember going to see Haile Gerima's Sankofa, you know, in Washington, D.C., and then some months or a year later, seeing Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust at the same time. And so in both films, you see the past of, in one film, slavery, in the other film, migration being rewritten. So that, thinking here of Julie Dash's film, the history of migration, the histories of black womanhood have to be told in terms of racialised and sexual violence having to do with rape. So in many ways, it was a displacement of the sort of master narrative of lynching as the way of framing migration and the sort of centrality of black cisgendered men to that narrative. And so with that film we saw a kind of re-articulation at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, the meanings of black womanhood. You know, that was hugely important for me.

And then in 1994, I go to the University of California, San Diego. And it's really in that context that the category "person of colour" or "communities of colour", became salient for me as political categories, right? Because in 1994, there was the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 on the ballot in California. And I remember that was the first time that I voted in California. And I thought, oh, this is absurd. No one's going to vote in favour of a proposition that says that because you're an immigrant, you don't deserve, you know, sort of public services around health care, around education, around worker protection. And then it passed overwhelmingly, right?

And then after that, it was the English-only Proposition as a way to marginalise, particularly, Spanish-speaking communities within the state. And then after that, it was the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209. It was in that context that at UC San Diego in California, you really saw a burgeoning cross-racial, cross-ethnic, politics and coalitions forming. So that, for instance, many of us were trying to figure out both in our work and in our activism if we're Asian American, if we're Chicano, if we're African American, you know, how do we articulate those identities, histories so that they are in dialogue with other racial and cultural formations.

So again, here, the rewriting of cultural identity and minority cultures for the purpose of responding to the state and capitalist economic formations, assault on whole swathes of minoritised populations.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thank you. Very interesting. Again, lots of things I want to pick up on, and I'm sure I'll come back to those. But just thinking about difference, I suppose, which is the other

sort of key word that comes out of this essay, and it reads very much of its time in that sense. I mean, it's an essay that Hall wrote not long after the sort of New Ethnicities and, and that kind of interest in hybridity and syncretism. And there's a sort of tension in this essay isn't there? And I wonder in this idea of sort of identity always becoming something, identity, cultural identity always as a motion of, you know, process rather than a finished end product.

But then Hall also talks about the sort of the kind of Jacques Derrida approach to a deferral of meaning that was also very popular at that time, or had become very modish in the '90s, that sort of infinite postponement of meaning where it doesn't then get locked down into any kind of political solidarity.

So I wanted to ask you, Gail and Rod, please feel free to jump in. You know, how were those tensions resolved by Hall, do you think, and how have they then kind of been amplified in the decades since or have they been resolved in some other ways or other contradictions come to light?

I mean, you know, representation, which is also the other half of difference, is not always unproblematic, is it? And I don't think he's saying it's unproblematic in this essay, but I think perhaps in the last 30 years, we've seen it become quite problematic. The diversity optics that I was referring to earlier for example. Gail, do you want to jump in?

Gail Lewis

Yeah, I have no idea how it's resolved. I think we live with the tension and I'm not sure that I think that Stuart resolved it. But what I do think is, is there's a track that's laid down in this essay and in some of the other essays that perhaps help us to do the work of trying to think about it. And that's the track of identification.

Because he talks about, you know, identities in all the ways that we've just talked about. But he also says that it's identification as part of the process. And in doing that, he's talking, he's referring to implicitly, in a sense, to the psychic dimensions of being positioned by and taking up positions in discourse. So it's the psychic dimension. So it's not just social cultural processes. But it's the stuff that gets into us, the ways in which the logics of normativity get into us and help us to think, oh, this is the truth of the world.

And one of those truths would be a sense, a kind of psychic truth that identity is fixed and given. It does come with particular bodies. You know, if you have a body called "female". Then the proper psychic resolution of that will be to take up a position as feminine. OK, and that would make sense that would make life make you fit in the world similarly with masculinity. And Hall talks about identification here and he talks about the ways in which this is unstable. And this is where the suturing comes.

OK, so if we hold on to the idea that identities are always in process of becoming. There'll be two. Two kinds of holds on that that act to kind of pull us back in a way. One will be the material context of lives. For example, if you have a class position and you think, oh, I can always be going on becoming in what it means to be of a particular class, working class, I'm thinking of here. But the idea somehow, but actually you still can't put food on the table or pay the rent. Or you're frightened about the knock on the window that's going to come because it's the bailiffs.

Then the idea that you can just go on to become another kind of ongoing process of class identity gets stopped a bit. You need to make sense of the material realities around you. Now, Hall talks about that, of course. But the other stop will be psychically. Can I bear to let go of what I feel is me, the true me, the real me, the authentic me that's given, that I've inherited through the old logics, the old ways of discussing identity and allow myself to be freed up by what's on offer?

In these new cultural moments, in the new modes of representation that are emerging. And I think that's in some sense, what comes to my mind is Twilight City. The film Twilight City. Where she's writing to her mother who's gone, telling her her story. *Mum, I'm really not who you thought I am. I'm all these different things*. You know, there's a queering of the question of identity in this. And mum has gone home. To be able to be her old self in a way. If I'm remembering right. But mum then wants to come back to London. And we get a sense of the psychic struggles. Of inhabiting a space in ourselves and in the world around us. That says we are always in process of becoming. Because sometimes that just feels too fragile. Too destabilising to a very kind of ontology of self. A very sense of, oh, this is me.

And I think Hall gives us in his un-fully worked out notion of identification if we go to psychoanalysis and try to think with identification, he offers us a way to say, not to resolve. But to understand more the tensions that you point to us here. I think in that way. So. I'd say that. You probably said something else at the end of that and I've lost it.

Aasiya Lodhi

No, don't worry, I always ask very long questions. Rod, do you want to come in on that? On the psychoanalysis point? I mean, he does talk about Fanon quite a lot in this essay as well. So he is addressing that. But also the tensions. I think that are sort of writ large in your work, which is the ways in which difference can be assimilated and has become increasingly so, right? And in the student experience, which you write of, for example.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. I mean that part that you just mentioned Aasiya, I got that from Stuart Hall. In terms of the arguments in the local and the global that essay that, you know, global capital uses, manipulates forms of cultural difference as a kind of branding exercise for itself for purposes of commodification. He says that you can go to New York and experience Asia through the cuisine and vice versa so that if difference can go either way, it means that there will never be resolution, right?

So the question isn't resolution. The question is, what are the various ways in which identity and culture are being deployed, right? So, if you think of this in terms of the essay that we're talking about it's in terms of what he describes as the sort of production of an essentialist notion of culture and difference versus a kind of re-articulative notion of culture and difference.

And they often intersect. I mean, that's the point that Gail is making, but also the point, as I take it, about identification and the use of Fanon. It's very easy to say that power, if we're thinking of here the static notion of culture power deploying that, for its own purposes, it's very easy to say that power does that, power is outside of me.

But what happens when we acknowledge that we're doing it, you know, that it also lives in us as well? So there's not a resolution at the site of the level of social structure, there's also not a resolution at the site of psychic structures, right? So then the question is how do we track the sort of the itineraries of power in the social and in the psychic but also the disruptions of power within the social and within me?

And for progressive folks it's like, so how do we produce a kind of political economy in which the disruptions, the new possibilities are greater than the conservative articulations and unfoldings of that, you know?

Gail Lewis

And to know as well that the social structures and the psychic structures don't necessarily move together at the same pace and, the psychic structures, the defensive moves that we make in order to survive, ourselves, may put a break, actually, although we may not be aware of it, on the very kind of logics of the social movement, the social push that we're trying to achieve and that's what we need to attend to too, to try to understand that as a break and a stoppage.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah, if I can add to that. One of the things that he's also very good about noting for us in this piece but also you find it in 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', you

mentioned the deferral of difference using Derrida for instance, Aasiya, and he says, well you know at some point there has to be a stop, like it can't be an endless deferral. In this piece he says it in terms of Derrida and that stop is where politics comes in, you know, there has to be a point in 'Cultural Studies and it's Theoretical Legacies' he doesn't use the figure of Derrida, he uses the figure of cultural studies right. There can't simply be the endless interrogation of difference in meaning, there has to be a point, he says, it's nothing if there's not a stake and it's that stoppage, the arbitrariness of the stop and also articulating stakes that for him is the moment of a politicisation.

Gail Lewis

And the way that that would manifest itself I think, that moment of stop, say in the British context, well I guess in any context, but in the British context at the time, is the ways in which particular identity groups, if you like, made claims against the state for full access to services, recognition, etc. That was a moment of stop, as a black woman we make this claim, as gays and lesbians we protest Section 28 etc. That kind of stuff. We do that in order to make claims against the state whilst also holding on to a parallel set of politics that says that identities are always in process of becoming.

Aasiya Lodhi

Absolutely. Gail I just wanted to go back to some of those points you made in relation to your actual experiences in the '70s and '80s, in relation to black British feminism because you were talking there about the uses of political blackness, which I think is a in stark contrast to the development of, for example, black radicalism as it's conceived in America, and for example your role which I didn't mention in the induction the setting up of OWAAD the Organization for Women of African and Asian Descent which was so important to the development of feminism in this country. And Hall makes a sort of reference to feminism in this article, in this essay although it's broadly conceived, not necessarily about black British feminism.

How can we conceive therefore - both of you have mentioned, very movingly, cross-racial solidarities, class solidarities, the importance of different political solidarities which move your progressive vision of the world. How do you think feminism fits into this essay, but also the things that we can draw out from what he's writing about, identification in development of his thinking at that time?

Gail Lewis

Well, I think probably OWAAD is a very good example of the ways in which the possibility of being not-yet-quite-formed persons with particular identities was a really good example. So OWAAD... Just one little back story just to say, when we formed OWAAD, we were originally going to call it the National Black Women's Organisation and because the people involved in the conversations about setting up what became OWAAD included many sisters from a student-based group called African Red Family that had sisters from all over the continent. and when we said we'll call it black, including those of us from the Caribbean and from the continent etc. but who had been born in Britain or raised in Britain, so we said we could call it the National Black Women's Organisation and some of the sisters said "why would we call ourselves Black Women's Organisation, that makes no sense to us?"

Who the term black made sense to was those of us who had been raised in Britain and sisters from South Africa and Zimbabwe because of Apartheid and Smith, where there was a racial logic of whiteness. So then we realised, oh, so black as a name under which even those of us of the diaspora can convene doesn't necessarily make sense. It's not so inclusive in that sense. So we will call it, the organisation, then it went to Organisation of Women of African and African Descent but then Asian sisters will work with us. So we changed it to include that. Okay. But I'm just pointing out how the different kinds of, if you like, the names as categories of representation on a level that could have appeal to diverse constituencies had to keep changing because we were in process of becoming something that could appeal to different organisations. Okay, because we were an umbrella group.

And I think then in that sense, what we now call political blackness, did we call it that at the time? I don't know. We said as a political term, but anyway, that's another thing, but what became known as political blackness, I think there was an attempt to say we can form alliances and solidarities with each other in ways that resist the colonial logics that separated us back home. And here we can kind of convene together to show the shared to point to and protest the shared conditions of our being in Britain at that time. Now, of course, there were all sorts of tensions in there as well: what did come to the fore? What got muted? What got pushed out of the conversation? but there was a way in which it did enable us to hold on to solidarities. And I think is indicative of the kind of thing that we're talking about here is identities being formed in the context of the particularities of the now. In that sense, in the conjuncture, in that sense. And so I think that's what, that's what happened. That's how I think about it now, of course, then eventually it changed. And now we talk about black and brown, women and queer and etc. rather than black in the old-time way that we used to.

Aasiya Lodhi

Has that got in the way? Can I ask both of you, in the way of formations of new forms of solidarity do you think, or no? I think terms in themselves-

Gail Lewis

The breakdown you mean, or the…?

Aasiya Lodhi

Yes, I mean I think terms in themselves are obviously, they're only one iteration of it as you say but I'm wondering if perhaps I mean there's a lot of questions, we will get to these, unsurprisingly there's already a lot of questions in the chat box about Kamala Harris, so over to you Rod.

[Laughter]

Aasiya Lodhi

There's a lot about that but yes well perhaps I could just jump to this question. Sarah's question which is that she says "I have been writing for a few years now about Stuart Hall's essay Cultural Identity and Diaspora to better understand diasporic feminist Stuart Hall and his activism and conjunctural analysis" but her question is "how much has the concept of the diasporic changed in more globalised forms of activism and understanding diasporic knowledge production today?" I suppose that's a term as well that it speaks very much of that time doesn't it? Those of us in Britain, those of colonised heritage who were in Britain at that moment, which again is slightly different to how it might be conceived of in America. Is the diaspora still a term that carries a lot of resonance do you think?

Roderick Ferguson

Gail, do you want to start with that?

Gail Lewis

I thought you were going Rod, going with Kamala Harris.

Roderick Ferguson

I need some time to sit with that one.

Gail Lewis

Well okay so I think one of the things I noticed in rereading the essay was the ways in which Stuart talks about diaspora and he's talking as well in a lot of ways in relation Jamaica again and the ways in which Jamaica and Jamaicans came back to a sense of Africa and its presence. You know, he talks about the three presences in the essay African, European and now, and what I notice is that actually Africa as the continent and its people, say Africans in Britain who are part of the diaspora, or Africans in the US who are part of the diaspora, kind of goes missing. It's Africa as an idea and as a cultural icon in a sense, but Africans as part of, you know, diasporic Africans as part of the conversation goes missing.

And I think now, I may be wrong, I may be completely wrong, that I think the question of how are all of these theoretical, political, epistemological, ontological questions thought about, there is an insistence that we need to think about what's coming from the continent itself to help us understand? So Zethu Matebeni's stuff around queer, for example, the South African activist scholar, queer person, the ways in which we really need to think about queer and its Anglo-Europeanness, which includes the US, of course, the Anglo-American notions, that we have to really think with, how does it translate into the continent? And how does it translate into different parts of the continent that I think then get picked up in part of the diasporic conversations in the UK and in the US, insofar as I am the little bit of the few streets that I tread in New Haven of the US, where I hear some of those conversations going on. You know, and that seems a major transformation. That when we say about our Africanness, hang on about what about the continent? What about actually people formed in the continent? Not just in relation to an imagined continent?

Roderick Ferguson

Gail's talking about her friends at this moment.

Gail Lewis

What'd you say?

Roderick Ferguson

I was like, you're talking about your friends at this moment, right? In New Haven.

Gail Lewis

Oh maybe, okay. No, but students in the classroom.

Roderick Ferguson

Oh, yeah, exactly. In the classroom.

Gail Lewis

Yeah. No, that's really where it comes from. Students in the classroom who are insisting, those students whose parents, you know, migrated here.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. If I could jump in, I think that it's uneven, right? I mean, I think that the students are insisting upon it because oftentimes they're not necessarily seeing it in the curriculum and in the writing. Like in terms of African American studies, I think that the way in which the category diaspora has been deployed has not necessarily been a will to grapple with, you know, the enormous complexities, past and contemporary, on the continent, you know?

And I do think the field of art has made greater advances than say the scholarship in African studies. I mean, African American studies in this country. I think that's the thing I would like to see, as you know. I think there's work that we have to do to make the category diaspora attend to or answer the students in the way that they deserve to be answered, and that is, okay, reflect for us the complexities of where we come from. Yeah. Who we are, and have that held in the terrain of Black Studies. I think that that is still work we need to do.

Gail Lewis

But I think that's right, Rod. But I think I'd also add after, so this essay was produced, you know, 1990, in 1996, Avtar Brah's 'Cartographies of Diaspora', book of essays. And where she really advanced, I think, advanced us in terms of thinking about the concept of diaspora, and how we might understand it as a way to analyse and to mobilise within

the social with her concept of 'diaspora space'. Now, of course, Avtar Brah, very much influenced by Stuart's work, very much kind of carrying on the lines that he laid down. But 'diaspora space', where she importantly tells us that diaspora space is not about a returning home and all of that kind of thing. But it's also a place where those who've moved have moved, and those who have stayed put have been moved.

Roderick Ferguson

Right.

Gail Lewis

So that then the understanding of locations within something called the national are spaces of diasporic engagement, tension, and movement, and the hopes towards progressive transformation, but equally could be reactionary transformation.

Roderick Ferguson

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Gail Lewis

That sense of diaspora, as actually we're all implicated in it.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Gail Lewis

And that's a crucial contribution from Avtar Brah. Absolutely building out of Stuart but showing us how if we work with Stuart, we can allow ourselves to do the work, challenge ourselves and produce new stuff. And then of course, Avtar's coming out of the black feminisms or the, what we now call black and brown feminisms of OWAAD, in thinking about how do we come together and understand your movement and my movement and how we got here and what we do, but now we're here.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. I think that's absolutely right. I mean, my comment was more about the institutional interpretation of the rich work that's out there on diaspora that hasn't fulfilled the richness of that work in practice.

Gail Lewis

Yeah, I agree. I wasn't arguing against you, Rod. I was just saying.

Roderick Ferguson

I mean, this isn't necessarily the sort of black context, but in the South Asian context in this country, when Gayatri Gopinath published 'Impossible Desires', right? You know, her analysis of diaspora as a category that was held predominantly by nationalism, and then the way in which South Asian feminist and also queer groups within the US and also within the cultural work, were trying to sort of grab it out of the hands of nationalists so that it's queer and feminist possibilities, and also contours could be better seen, right? We have yet to materialise analyses like that.

Aasiya Lodhi

There's a question about that, if I can jump in. They say, "in the tensions between being and becoming, how do you see popular sovereignty and self-determination play out further with the difference between a unified people and amorphous distinct masses? How do we reconcile identity?"

But some other questions as well. We've had another question, just going back to Brah and other thinkers of that time, so Paul Gilroy as well. "Do you feel that there's a lack of synthesising", an anonymous writer writes, "synthesising thought that Hall offered in the '80s and '90s and that we lack today? To me, so much is happening in relation to these issues, BLM, the attack on critical race theory, the Me Too movement, the growth of genuine near overt racist, Nazi political formations. Yet I do not feel that we have overarching perspectives that Hall and Gilroy provided from the mid-'80s onwards."

So two questions there that sort of connect to what you were just speaking to. Would you like to, either of you, to jump in?

Gail Lewis

Want to jump in, Rod?

Roderick Ferguson

Well, I mean, I would just say that I actually think that what Gail brought up and what I was trying to point out in 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', and also in this essay in terms of it's not unity versus the amorphous. It's unity versus an awareness of the internal complexities and differences within cultural formations and the stoppage, like where are the stakes, you know?

So that you can acknowledge a heterogeneity within, say, blackness, and also come to an understanding of what needs to be addressed, right? You know, so an example of that would be precisely, I think, the way in which many people are responding to this moment, in terms of the book bans, the targeting, the repression around critiques of the genocide, that you've got all of these different groups who are trying to make their voices heard on behalf of, say... take the issues of the book bans. Florida, the state of Florida has banned pretty much everything having to do with queerness, feminism, race, people of colour.

In the context of the Palestine solidarity work, you see black people, you see Asians, you see whites, you see Native folks, you see Latinx folks, all of whom announcing and holding their differences and also agreeing that they can mobilise their differences, their histories with colonialism, their histories with segregation for this particular issue. So I think that we need to learn from that and do more of that where people aren't, you know, sort of suppressing their differences in the name of a unified response, but actually mobilising their differences and harnessing them for an intervention around particular struggles. I hope that makes sense?

Aasiya Lodhi

It does to me. Gail, would you like to come in?

Gail Lewis

Yeah. I was thinking about that question about people doing the kind of gathering up thinking. And to be honest, I don't know whether it's happening or not. In a way, I feel hesitant to say it isn't. Because I feel I don't know. But what I do think, and this is maybe wrong, but what we see in terms of activism and what we see in terms of some of the cultural practitioners, the artists, the filmmakers, etc. who are trying to attend to this moment by speaking to both what it's possible to be and offer us some of the tools to become something else. But doing so in a way that doesn't try to speak for others, but opens the space for saying, if I can be this, can you be in conversation with me? And somehow we kind of overlap in that conversation, those artistic productions, if you like,

and carry forward. Or lay down and carry forward a terrain in which it is possible to be otherwise, if you like. To be otherwise.

And I think that's happening. I think as well that the activism that we've seen around Palestine and just who is on those pickets, marches, demonstrations, the calls, that coming together in a kind of recognition, of the urgency of both a solidarity, but a refusal to be spoken for by governments complicit with and making possible genocide, which is to say maybe on the ground, in activism, and I don't want to reify activism, but maybe the activism is ahead in terms of the coming together than what's going into the written texts as opposed to the other texts of cultural representation that may be going on. And I don't know. It's a hunch. Maybe it's a hope as well. But it's just what one has seen, what I've seen in terms of in New Haven and in London, in terms of the activism around Palestine, for example, and what one sees in the cultural productions.

Aasiya Lodhi

Absolutely. Two comments here, or questions, which I'll just read aloud. And I feel you've answered them already but just to say, one was about Palestine and the many Muslim diasporic bodies who have moved to the Global North and can relate to, where do they sit in your analysis of diaspora or Hall's understanding of it? That was an anonymous comment. And then Rod, Earl's comment, which was that in the last 18 months or so, issues around anti-Semitism had divided parts of the anti-racist and left movements, particularly since the Israeli army's devastation of Gaza. Jewish identities are almost the definitive diasporan set of identities but appear to have become anchored by Zionism.

We talked about this in our very first event in the series, nationalism, whiteness in a presence European. Hall ends this essay, as Rod rightly says, with nods towards Benedict Anderson's 1982 Imagined Communities. But how are we to move out of the shadow of the national imaginary, the most powerful and enduring perhaps of strategic essentialisms? And it's another mammoth question. But I think, again, something that's popped up in all the three sessions we've had in this Reading the Crisis series. How can we move beyond the nation? We felt that sort of talking especially about Zionism and the development of it in the very first conversation that we had felt that previously as a historian, they're saying that, you know, we thought we had moved beyond the nation-state and yet here we are again, trapped within it and how cultural identification can be used to resist, but also can be co-opted, instrumentalised.

Either of you want to take on that question? Or do you want to think about it and come back to it and I can ask another question about other parts of the world?

Roderick Ferguson

Well, I mean, maybe I'll just take a first shot. I think that in many ways it is what the essay is getting at, especially toward the end. I mean, the quote from Fanon is exactly this. How is it that the nation, to riff off of Gail, resides in us psychically? Yes there is the way in which the nation is a social structure but its entrenchment is also about a kind of psychic embeddedness so how do you wrestle with that? Try to eject it? Part of what I appreciated in rereading this, and was reminded of, is that you know he [Stuart Hall] makes the argument that this cannot be a notion of diaspora that take the nation as the natural ground so it cannot be about then reproducing the violence of the nation.

If you think back here to Max Weber's argument that the nation state is that formation that claims to have a monopoly on the legitimacy of violence, right, and what does it mean then to presume a notion of diaspora that takes the nation as axiomatic and then reproduces the logic of violence from the nation?

So we need a different notion of diaspora or a different articulation of diaspora and they are out there and part of what's at stake in that is that so that we're not reproducing the violence of the nation state form or of nationalist ideology. That seems to me to be his argument about what's at stake in terms of the re-articulation of diaspora of cultural identity and of the cultural past.

Gail Lewis

And central to that, just to riff off that, is that he talks about diaspora as, actually I wrote the quote down, "diaspora identities are those which are continually producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference" and that question of difference here, not just being the Derrida differ and defer, but what Audre Lorde calls non-dominant difference. So we recognise again our specificity but we don't put it in a hierarchy but rather in a field of difference that needs then a way to be articulated, to use another Stuart Hall kind of concept. And it seems to me in that context then the different view through that prism. Somebody talked about the very different varieties of Muslim groups that have moved to the Global North, they're part of that field of non-dominant difference. And we need to make it non-dominant difference we need to grapple with our psychic investments in hierarchical difference as well as the social order of hierarchical difference in order to make your specificity and mine be able to be in commune with each other and in conversation with each other.

So I think that's part of the project that's laid out for us but my mind's also turning now to where we look for considerations of all these questions because so far we've kind of looked at, you know, social structures, psychic structures, big, big, stuff up there, to governments and modes of governance and implicitly racial capital and its globalised

logics, and all of that implicitly. But if we look at the bottoms at the ends, at the blocks, as we might say if we're in London, you know the people who live in the blocks, the projects I guess it would be called here in the US. The people at the ends, in the bottoms, where actually the living of life is both in keeping with the normative and also in radical refusal of it. Everywhere you go you hear it on the bus, you see it in the market, you pick it up in little bits and pieces, maybe our own families, but it's there that

I think that we begin to see some of the the living practices of reproducing themselves in transformation and difference because it's precisely in refusal of the normative even whilst when we go to our work or we're stopped by the police or we go to the health services we're positioned again in the normative but our lives are lived somewhere else and that's, I think we need to look there too, and that's what is picked up I think by artists and cultural producers. That's the the stuff that they reflect back to us, oftentimes, and there might be something that we can harness to develop our thinking and also to make our thinking more in alignment with what's being lived in the bottoms.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah if I could also add that when you were talking Gail I was thinking about how in the essay he [Stuart Hall] invokes the category of deferral in terms of Derrida, in the beginning of at least, but by the end the deferral is not about Derrida it's about the deferral of the nation-state and nationalist ideology. To your point, I think that we see that deferral all over the place. I mean when I was participating in the encampments here or visiting encampments in the UK invariably, there was always a sign 'Jews for ceasefire' or 'Jews against the war'.

Gail Lewis

'Not in my name.'

Roderick Ferguson

Exactly. The encampment here were Muslim and Jewish students in common prayer so the deferral is happening in terms of the deferral of the nation-state but also a nationalist articulation of certain cultural identities, that is happening. We have to encourage it, we have to build upon it, to use his [Stuart Hall's] category, that also has to be serialised.

Gail Lewis

Exactly.

Aasiya Lodhi

You're both talking so concretely and so profoundly there about where we have to look but just to bring back to some of the points that have been made that are on a sort of a broader canvas but I think you've sort of answered these. Two people have asked about where do you think black and brown, especially South Asian solidarity lies today in the UK? We've had a history that's been obscured of collective solidarity and organising together with young people today in the UK at least, are drawing clear lines between black and brown struggles,

I feel you've sort of answered that, I mean the encampments, Palestine protests may be one space in which this is happening. That was an anonymous question. AD says "I appreciate that question because as a US citizen who spent time living in the UK I was surprised I think by the politicisation of black and shared history of the African diaspora and South Asian because I do not see your experience this in the same manner in the US and I appreciate the speaker's ideals of solidarity in both the US and the UK.

And then [an attendee] says, "do we need to think more about the slippages and or tensions between the material, physical aspects of space underpinning notions of, let's say, Africa or Asia and the imaginative psychic aspects and their political manifestations and enactments?" I think you've touched on some of those issues in those answers. But if you'd like to jump in on any of those, otherwise there's many other questions I can go to. Lots and lots of people also saying, thank you so much. This is a really brilliant and interesting conversation. A question about Brah, which I'll come back to you, Avtar Brah. "In her book, Avtar Brah asks, when does a place of residence become home? Just wondering how these shapes are thinking about diaspora and how it's deployed in academia in everyday life". Are we at home in academia?

Gail Lewis

No.

Roderick Ferguson

Oh, no. No.

Gail Lewis

Do we navigate a way through? To some extent, I guess, you know. More importantly, perhaps it's how do we use, take the resources that it offers and the challenges and responsibilities it gives us to say, how do we begin to invite students to think in this way and to enable themselves to say, really to imagine themselves differently. That's the challenge and the responsibility, I think. Whether that's about finding a home in the academy, I think not. It may be saying something about learning is a separate thing.

It may happen in a space called the academy, but it's not what the academy thinks of as learning. Learning and being able to continuously learn as part of the process of always in process of becoming might be the thing that we can get some of the resources to help inculcate in students just as students press us to do that in the challenges they pose I think. Because the institution is one thing the relations of teaching and learning can be another, I think. That just came to me.

Aasiya Lodhi

Excellent. Rod, do you want to say something?

Roderick Ferguson

I mean, I'm still thinking about the Kamala Harris question.

Aasiya Lodhi

I could actually ask that question if you want a little bit more detail because there were two separate questions.

Roderick Ferguson

Okay, maybe ask them.

Aasiya Lodhi

They're both by anonymous attendees. "How does Kamala Harris' ascension to the Democratic Presidential Candidature, what does it mean for this discussion now?" And second, "Do you think the concept of the Black Atlantic has broken down given that the "outsider" group, (outsider in quotation marks), in some parts seem to identify with their nation-states?" So back to the nation-state issue again. The conception of UK black

history and the position of African Americans regarding Kamala Harris. I think just to sort of spell out also that there's questions about her identification isn't there as a a black American? I think perhaps maybe that's alluding to that, again a different kind of issue to how it might be perceived in Britain.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah, I'm reminded of something that Angela Davis recently said in an interview where she was talking about just the dismal state of politics and political culture in the US, particularly in this election season. And she said that it is a moment to remind ourselves of something that people always knew going back to especially in the Civil Rights Movement, the moment in which people think the point of that was the achievement of the vote and electoral office. And that was never the point. It was always about grassroots struggles. Voting was just one item on the menu it was not supposed to be the most important item within which we would lend our psychic energies, our hopes to the detriment of all the other items especially community organising and grassroots organising. It's never supposed to be that.

It looks like Kamala Harris will get the full endorsement from the Democratic Party. The danger of this moment is that it can simply be a confirmation that the point of politics is in their sort of electoral embodiment, right? And that that becomes a way to identify with the nation-state through, now, a black woman. I mean, you saw something similar when Barack Obama was the president here that much of the political imagination was around who is Barack Obama, what's he going to do, what kind of ways in which he might save us, you know? That's the danger of this moment in that it becomes a kind of resource for the kinds of identifications that Hall talks about, that Gail has also pulled out. We can be pragmatic in terms of voting. We don't have to necessarily also then use that pragmatism as the stage for our identifications. You know?

Aasiya Lodhi

Another side to that question is really that I think it was in the text of a previous question, but there's now a specific question about this, which is about strategic essentialism. So [an attendee] says, "From my own complicated identities, I understand my voice as a Jew for Palestine as an embodiment of strategic essentialism. I wonder if the presenters might reflect on strategic essentialism in this current moment." A reminder that strategic essentialism being where a group that clusters around a kind of cultural identity, a social identity, decides perhaps to kind of essentialise, in some way, in order to gain some sort of political traction. I mean, I'm hugely simplifying there. So do you take that apart if you want? Gail, do you want to jump in on this?

Gail Lewis

Yeah, well, I mean, I would say that sometimes we absolutely have to use it. You know, someone who came back at one point was a kind of sociologist of social policy, if you like. So I'm often thinking about from where do we make claims on the state, as I talked about earlier. So, for example, all of the evidence that's coming up in the British context, and we know it's the same in the US context, but the ways in which black and brown, to use the current language, women in the UK are giving birth, are denied all sorts of assistance or a capacity for agency in thinking about how they birth and whether they get painkillers and all of that, because the idea is that black women feel no pain at all and Asian women feel a tiny bit. You know, I'm being a bit crude here, but this idea that those women don't need assistance in birthing. Then obviously the claim that we make for proper health care in pregnancy and maternity services can be done on the basis of a strategic essentialism.

You know, I think that absolutely makes sense. And it's done in a language that speaks to the ways in which the stats are gathered in those institutions. You know, if they're gathered at all. And it also identifies a specific profound abuse that's happening in the service delivery. So I think that would happen in the same, you know, mental health services, it's rife about who gets what access to what and how and all of that. So I think that would always be important. But it does seem to me that's a bit like, to go back to Rod's word, pragmatic. You know, it's mobilising for a particular demand or set of demands for access to a particular set of resources. It's not us saying, it's not the end point. This is who I am, kind of thing, so in that sense, I think we would always need to do that.

Aasiya Lodhi

It's that tension again between a process of becoming and acknowledgments of difference. And then they're mobilising, although I suppose perhaps they're implying that it's something where people will join in but they're not always au fait with the fact that they're, you know, interacting, taking part in something that is a form of strategic essentialism, I guess. And then the limitations and frustrations and compromises that are seen as going too far perhaps.

Gail Lewis

But in the process as well that might also provide an opportunity in so, you know, groups of women get together to make those demands and in the process of kind of politicising it, becoming a community in action, if you like, a temporary community in action, there

may well also gain a sense of, oh, there's something transforming here. You know, this is also in process of becoming, you know, me and my sisters, as it were.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah.

Gail Lewis

The thinking and understanding differently.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. I think that what I hear in the colleague's question is that part of Hall's essay where he's talking about re-articulation of the past and that as a way of acknowledging the workings of power in cultural identity and also in the narratives of culture. Right, so that in this instance, if you re-articulate your identity as a Jewish person against the essentialist notions deployed by a nation-state, in this case, Israel, it then obligates one to think about the historical components of that identity that veer away from the nation-state's apprehension of it, like the way in which the nation-state tries to make that very complex, very rich history into a univocal one in service of the nation-state. The best strategic essentialisms ought to compel us to do that searching of the past and re-articulating the past.

And people are doing it now. I mean, that's another interesting thing about this moment. So you see Jewish writers and scholars saying, okay, hold on, let's talk about the moments in which Jewish identity, culture, and Judaism were made to be in the service of state nationalism and how that is a contrivance.

Aasiya Lodhi

Absolutely. A couple of comments about what you've just been talking about. "Thank you for this conversation. The impression I get is that we must explore," says an anonymous attendee, "these questions of identity across different scales, not just in relation to the nation, but also how it manifests and emerges in our everyday encounters." "A brilliant conversation," another anonymous attendee says, "goes a long way in instilling a certain reassurance in this bleak time, especially against the backdrop of what's happening in Palestine."

"The Indian state attempts to invisibilise as well as criminalise solidarity with Palestinians and is of course very concerned." Another anonymous says, "What Gail is mentioning about birthing prejudices on Black women is in Sylvia Federici's book, 'Beyond the Periphery of the Skin' is a perfect source on this." Two big questions, but I'm just going to run back to an earlier question, which I thought was very interesting, we're slightly running out of time and there's more and more questions coming. So I'll try to get to as many as we can. There was one which was about modes of writing. "Thank you, Gail and Rod for this incredible conversation. I would love to get your thoughts on rewriting. I find that to be such a rich concept and it's a very clear refusal of knowable, fixed, coherent archive and story. Can you both share how you might take Hall's notion of rewriting to discuss methodology and/or acquiring a methodology?"

Roderick Ferguson

One of the things that I learned when I first started reading Stuart Hall in 1994, which is also when I met him and Catherine Hall, because one of my advisors, George Lipsitz, had invited them to UC San Diego, where I was a graduate student, and it was my first year of graduate school. I actually didn't know who he was. And then afterwards I realised, OK, I really need to know who this man is. And so ever since then, I think that I have only ever rewritten, you know? But I've always thought that that project of rewriting, whether it's, alright, in my first book, let me rewrite the history of sociology, and then the history of African-Americans in this country in relation to sociology around sexuality, gender, race, or in the second book, let me try to rewrite the narrative of the American University. You know, the third book, let me try to rewrite the narrative of U.S. student movements. And then the fourth book, let me try to rewrite the story of the Stonewall Rebellion and what came after that. There are multiple genealogies here. But it's always Stuart Hall in relation to, you know, a kind of feminist and queer mandate to rewrite as well.

And so that rewriting agenda, you know, is in many ways, a feminist and queer articulation of Stuart Hall's mandate around re-articulation. So I'll just say that and maybe bounce it off to Gail.

Gail Lewis

Hmm. Well, I guess in similar mode, really, I'm not going to give you a series of books because they're not there. But I suppose there's a way in which some of the pieces that I've written have been attempts to rewrite the stories of Britain in a particular moment. So my 'Birthing Racial Difference: Conversations with my Mother and Others', which is

absolutely a rewriting through what I would call an experience near embodied, embedded theoretical place.

The story of what it meant of how we could understand interracial relationships and the birthing of children like me, kind of thing. In my case, a white mum and a black father, at a moment - so it came out in 2009 at a moment when There was a kind of lot of applauding of look, the biggest growing category is the mixed category. And And look what that says about race relations in Britain and all of this nonsense. So that's a kind of autoethnographic telling of the domestic and psychic life of racism in its gendered articulations and class articulations in one household that I grew up in, in a sense. And it's done as a letter, but it is an attempt to retell. It's an attempt to make an intervention into that particular moment. Similarly, I've done something similar in relation to fathers as well to talk about the psychic recovery of black men as fathers in my life, but to go against the narrative that black men cannot be fathers and cannot be psychically experienced as fathers.

That's the key thing of that text, So rewriting in that sense. So it's about ways of retelling the stories and maybe also thinking about the form in which those rewritings happen. And I've gone more and more to the epistolary form. Let me write a letter that can feel experience near and can also both make statements that are claims, if you like, theoretical claims. But saying these are not the be all and end all because it's one woman in conversation, and influences from multiple places, who's offering, making an offering. So the rewriting in that sense to kind of destabilise the idea of the one who knows.

Roderick Ferguson

Yeah. I'll also say that there's a link here between the question of rearticulation at the level of writing and also What's at stake in becoming. Like the rearticulation in writing says to the reader, you can become. That part of you that is questioning, that part of you that feels a nudge of something different. You know, you can do it, you can let that part of you run free.

A story that I like to tell, when I taught Gail's Birthing Racial Difference piece to my incarcerated students. This is about four years, five years, four years ago, and we ended with that piece. This is at a maximum security men's prison, mostly black men in the room. We ended with that piece. And the first thing they said was that that piece was amazing. And I said, amazing? And they said, amazing! And I realised that for them. One, it gave them, those who are biracial, it gave them a language to talk about their complicated relationships. You know, of love and frustration and anger with their mothers. You know, it also gave all of them a language for talking about how race, nationalism lives at very effective levels. You know? And so some of them went on to

write pieces, essays about their relationships, intimate relationships with mothers, but also with family because of that. So there is a way in which the re-articulated writing as re-articulation gives permission to readers to become what they want to become, what they didn't know they could become. You know?

Gail Lewis

And that reminds me Rod, in a way, of the part in Stuart's 'Familiar Stranger' where he talks about being at Paddington. You know, he's going to Oxford. His mum's with him on the station. And he sees all these West Indians, as we were called then, at Paddington. You know, Paddington. It's Paddington, 1951, so. And he thinks, oh. There's all those people that are kind of like me, but not like me. Maybe I can become like them. And that would be people like my dad. You know? So just that moment where he articulates that very, you see something or you experience something. Oh. Some recognition. A kind of uncanny recognition, if you like, that can then become different.

Roderick Ferguson

If the sort of nationalist rendering of culture, you know, in its production of essentialism is about constraining of possibility, re-articulation is about producing the conditions for possibilities to open up.

Aasiya Lodhi

And I think that practice of rewriting that you're talking about and re-articulation speaks to this question I just wanted to read out which says, "to avoid eulogising a great thinker, what do you find unsatisfactory or wanting in Stuart Hall back then and now? Or in another way, what is our challenge now as well as what was his?" Thank you. But I wonder if really it's both those things. One is our challenge is to rewrite it or to write the bits of it that we feel need rewriting for now and using them. But also, I suppose, in reading it and becoming transformed by it, becoming through the reading of Hall and trying to find new ways, new conditions of possibilities and say, I don't know if you want to add to that at all. You might disagree with what I've just said.

Gail Lewis

No, I don't disagree with what you just said. But for me, the thing that's always was and continues to be wanting in Stuart is a sense that in his mind, as he's writing and in conversation with people. Because, you know, you just have to know Stuart at the Open

University, it wasn't a singular thing, It wasn't like I'm just doing this, it's like in conversation and for a collective project, for the purpose of a collective project. But the figure of the black woman as a site and resource for mobilising radical transformation, perhaps for having ideas about black feminism as a site of that, I think was missing. Very much missing. And that's all of a piece with the ways in which the figure of the black woman in the UK is sort of unimaginable at one level. She's not unimaginable as a school kid who might be bringing drugs into school and therefore needs to be strip searched at 15 years old on her period. Child Q, I'm referring to in Hackney. You know and abused by the police and by the school. She's not unimaginable as a source of contamination. But as somebody who might offer something. Whether we agree with it or not, in a sense, the figure of the black woman disappears.

And we saw it so profoundly around the Diane Abbott thing. Forty-six times standing up in Parliament with a red jacket on, never called. And disappearing from that national conversation that was sparked when that guy, what was his name? The guy, the Tory donor.

Aasiya Lodhi

Frank Hester?

Gail Lewis

That's right. Yeah. Who did that abuse about, you know, "You see Diane Abbott and you want to kill all Black women. She should be shot." Being allowed to be said. And of course "it wasn't racist or sexist. Colour doesn't matter to me. And race, racism's terrible." But in the responses to that. Black women as a living, embodied, sentient category. And as a category of representation disappeared. It all became about diversity, minorities, all that kind of stuff. So there's a way in which there's something that's pervasive about the absence of black women in British thinking. And for me, a little bit of Stuart's in that. But we can do something with Stuart's work ourselves to bring ourselves back in, so that's the difference.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thank you. Rod, would you like to have the last word?

Roderick Ferguson

Again in conversation with Gail, there's a part in 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies' where he says, you know, he would never forget the moment in which the feminists, and he's talking about the white feminists, as Gail has said in this instance. We're trying to get the dudes to understand the significance of gender as a social formation and as a psychic formation, and I've always thought, what would it mean if, because he notes it as a shift, but he doesn't necessarily run with it.

Gail Lewis

Yeah, exactly.

Roderick Ferguson

He doesn't really assimilate the shift. And what would have happened if he had assimilated that shift? And I don't say that, you know, out of judgment or any harshness, but as a kind of object lesson for myself and also as a teacher and as a writer. Like, how do you, how do I teach myself? How do I teach my students to recognise this shift, even in the most suggestive mode, you know, to just sit with it and then build from it? And yeah, that would be it.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay. Thank you so much. That's an amazing place to end, I think. Lots and lots of rich thoughts there. And sadly, we do have to draw today's conversation to a close. So thank you so much to Gail Lewis and to Roderick Ferguson for all their insights and what I think we can all agree was a fascinatingly rich discussion.

And I'm sorry if we couldn't get to everybody's questions. We will try to post them, perhaps, when we put this on the website in terms of the video. Thanks also again to Tayyab Amin and to Orsod Malik for their support in running this event. Thank you especially to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust, and to Duke University Press for making this event possible.

Our recording, as I said, will be made available in the next few weeks. Please do keep an eye on the Explore section of our website, which has a growing set of digital learning resources. That's stuarthallfoundation.org. And a friendly reminder, we are a small charity and our programmes would not be possible without support from our funders and friends. So if you enjoy our work, please help us by making a one-time donation or by pledging a monthly gift. Please use the link that's in the chat box. So many thanks

again to Gail and to Roderick. It was honestly a huge privilege to be in conversation with you. And finally, a massive thank you to all of you for joining us today and across the entire Reading the Crisis series. We hope these conversations will continue in other forms and in other locations in the weeks and months that follow.

Not least in our Autumn Keynote with Robin D. G. Kelley taking place at Conway Hall in London on the 5th of September. Tickets for that are now on sale via our website, stuarthallfoundation.org. So I hope to see you there. But for now, thank you.