

# MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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## **PERSONALLY SPEAKING** *A Long Conversation with Stuart Hall*

Transcript

### **JAMAICA: FAMILY & CULTURE**

**Maya Jaggi (MJ):** Stuart, you spent your first nineteen years in Jamaica—In terms of arts and culture, what were you reading, listening to, watching in those years?

**Stuart Hall (SH):** Well, the sort of music that we heard all the time was Jamaican folk music; really based on folk songs. Or some of them based on melodies we may have borrowed from English dance music but adapted to Jamaican vocabulary and so on. Anyhow there was a Jamaican folk music called mento and as sort of teenagers that's one of the musics that we danced to. Otherwise we heard a lot of American music; I used to listen on the radio to hit parade with Frank Sinatra. When Frank Sinatra was just an upcoming singer. We listened to no classical music that I could think of at that stage. What was I reading? Well the most important thing that happened to me is that when I was about 14, the Jamaican library opened a section for young people, which was enormously influential for people of my generation. For the first time we could go and you know take books out from the library and read. And so I started to read really in literature and the arts sort of around the traditional curriculum without learning at school. Because I think that you also have to put into this picture that I am at a very conventional Jamaican school modeled on a sort of English public school with a very academic English oriented curriculum.

So of course I'm reading traditional English literature, I'm reading Shakespeare, I'm reading Dickens, I'm reading Thackeray, and I'm reading Jane Austin as part of my curriculum. So my sort of wider intellectual reach really is fed by going to the library on Saturday mornings and following the trails. And I begin to read modern poetry. I remember the first time I read *The Wasteland*. I remember hearing about, you know, Ezra Pound and about modern literature and about James Joyce and I was aware that there was a thing called modern literature going on; a thing called the modern novel- which I didn't know anything about. I began to hear about modern painters. I began to hear about Picasso and Braque and Paul Klee. I was very fond of Paul Klee. Klee kind of both amused me and kind of shocked me at you know the license that he had with realism and so on. I was also beginning to look, to listen a little bit to contemporary music, Stravinsky and so on.

But the most important musical influence on me at that stage is really Jazz. I was introduced to Jazz by somebody at school; at my school. It's of course the birth of Modern Jazz; the beginning of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie and so on. And we began to be able to get 78's with them on for the first time. I thought it was the most exciting music that I had heard. You know, it was a music that appealed to me because of its sophistication. I liked its intricacy. I liked its melodic intricacy and so on. I like that fact that it spoke from a sort of sophisticated urban experience that I—was different than Kingston. But at the same time I was aware that this was very substantially Black music. So Black sophistication—I mean I didn't know anything about the Harlem Renaissance you know things that had gone on in Black American culture in the 20's and so on; which of course itself was tremendously sophisticated. I didn't know anything about that really. But I was aware that there was a certain emotional intensity that this came out of a particular kind of Black experience. So the combination of Black experience and urban sophistication and a sort of modern modern popular music was very influential for me. So that's the sort of you know that's the landscape from which really I sort of made the decision once I got a scholarship to study abroad that I would study literature which was the closest to the arts that I could see sort of making sense in terms of my background.

**MJ:** And just to complete the picture what about movies?

**SH:** Movies were tremendously important. I must have gone, between the ages of twelve or thirteen and seventeen, I must have gone to the movies at least once a week. Usually on Saturday afternoons – Saturday afternoon matinees. You know I saw all of Humphrey Bogart, I saw all of film noir, I saw all of melodrama, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, you know Joan Fontaine. The whole lot. I really had an incredible education in modern contemporary American cinema, very largely American cinema. Towards just the end before I left, there was a French film association which brought- began to bring some of the French early French movies, not yet the new wave cause that's a bit later, but early French movies and Italian movies. And that was a very specialized occasion. But the other was a regular popular experience, which we all went to. We didn't know what we were- that we were seeing you know- the full fruit of our American popular cinema in black and white but that's what we were doing. And that continued, incidentally, into my student days. I used to go to the movies sometimes even on Monday afternoons which was it was a certain gesture about as a graduate student deciding to go the movies in Oxford on a Monday afternoon.

**MJ:** In terms of your parents and your family background how would you describe them and also your social awareness of color at that period?

**SH:** Well my um my parents came from very different backgrounds; both middle class but my father was from much poorer more low middle class background; lived in the country in a small town, he ran a pharmacy. He was quite well educated and so on. But my father was sent to a good school. But they were really quite poor in their background. My mother lived in Port Antonio, which was a big bustling export, banana export town in the north coast—wonderful place actually one of my favorite places in Jamaica. She came from a respectable family closer to the English expatriate. They weren't English

expatriates but if you look at the color of my grandmother you could see that she had white grandparents I'd say. But more than that, her own parents were not very well off, her mother was a postmistress, her father taught in the Agricultural school. But she was adopted by quite well off uncles and aunts, one a doctor the other a lawyer. They belonged to the bourgeoisie of Port Antonio. She formed through that adoption, she adopted the spirits and attitudes of the small planter class although she didn't actually belong to it. That is the experience that she brought into my family. My father went to a good school, got an early very good opportunity with the United Food Company, which was the big banana exporting company—the American based banana-exporting company then. He got a very lowly job in the financial department but it was a good job for a young Jamaican boy like him because the upper echelons of that company at that time would all of been White Jamaicans or expatriates. But he was much closer to the country middle class. He had country ways, he only learned to be the accountant of a foreign firm over time really. Actually his promotion was the promotion of the first colored person in that company. He was the first Jamaican, local Jamaican, in that company who ever held each of the positions that he held. He ended up as the chief accountant before that there had never been a local Jamaican colored man who had been the chief accountant. We moved to, the family moved to Kingston and my parents were there. Now they belonged to the Kingston sort of professional so called business classes really. They had very distinct attitudes in relation to everybody else. Everybody else whom they never referred to directly by color but color was so engrained in the whole everyday life, speech, language, attitude, outlook of Jamaica. Everything is run through by questions of color. I'm not talking just about black and white I'm talking about the fine gradations of color between the nearly white and the not so white and the brown and the dark brown and the quite black and the very black etc. These were the distinctions that mattered; organized in terms of color and of class, the interrelationships of color and class. My grandmother could rank anybody on this grid just by looking at them. She would say, "he's got a black father, you know," and you know exactly what that meant, you know – he looked as if he was brown, he looked as if he was passing as middle class, but she knew that he came from a working class background and black as well. So though nobody talked color, color was just in the air we breathe actually.

Now, you know, when I went to school the school was quite broadly based, it was a scholarship school. You got to if you could pass the scholarship so everybody was there – bright black kids, expatriate kids, Jamaican whites, the brown middle class – everybody was there. But my family wouldn't allow me to bring home boys darker than me. They wouldn't say it was because of color but they would say 'it's not the sorts of people I think you should be fraternizing with.' So, I mean, from very early on it was an apocryphal story in my family that I was the darkest member of the family, I am the darkest member of my family. And I remember my sister always said that I was the coolie of the family. Now coolie is a very particular word. What it refers to are poor, itinerant Indian farmers of whom there are not many in Jamaica but you know, they were, at that time, very poor indeed. But I think the use of the word coolie is interesting because you see she wanted to say something about my color but she couldn't say 'he's blacker than anybody' that would've set explosions going in our home. So she reached for another word which wasn't really so salient, there weren't very many Indians around, but she said 'where did

you get that coolie baby from?' she'd ask my mother. And this is important in my own relationship to the social world that my family occupied because, you know, I thought I'm different from them, somehow different from them, somehow not quite fitting in. And what I wasn't fitting in was not so much what they were but what they aspired to be. They aspired to be with people richer than themselves, they aspired to be acknowledged by the United Fruit Company people – the accountants from Boston came down and my mother socialized with them. She brought into my family the ways of life of a small landed class. We had servants – everybody at that time had servants in the middle class, even below that – but there were also hundreds of people who looked after our – they sharpened the cutlasses, they cut the hedges, they trimmed the grass, etc. Now, my mother, there was no rate for the job because there was not a commercial relationship, my mother thought, really these people owed it to her. It was a kind of gift relationship. But she would pay them something, of course, but she would pay them something that they were in her gift, you know. Now gradually, as I came to the conscious kind of person I could not stand the relationship my family posited for me in relation to the rest of society. I just thought, 'this is not me,' I can't stand the aspirations my father has to belong to the white cricket club where I know they're going to look down and despise him. I couldn't understand how he couldn't see that he's being patronized by them, you know. We didn't have all that much money so my mother's aspirations to become a kind of bourgeois grand-dame, you know – where does this come from? It was sustained on nothing really, on false hope. This is the colonial fantasy. This is the colonial fantasy, middle class colonial fallacy that really value comes from elsewhere that good things come from elsewhere, everything connected with Jamaica is tainted by the colonial relationship, people darker than yourself are lower down the social scale and less educated. You know that's just the air you breathe, that's just how you understand society is organized and by the time I was 17 or 18 I just couldn't bear it. I literally couldn't bear it. I couldn't identify with my family's aspirations for me; I didn't want to belong to their social world.

There was no other way for a middle class boy in Kingston – you know I couldn't walk out of the front door and say 'I'm going to downtown Kingston to meet the people,' you know. How do you get in touch with everybody else? So I felt alienated from Jamaican society as it was emerging. Remember, it's emerging after the political riots in 1958, which runs right across the Caribbean, 1938, which runs right across the Caribbean and is really the birth of modern politics in the Caribbean. It's the moment of the assertion of the demand for colonial independence. So the society is being geared up to independence. The boys I'm at school with are all into becoming citizens of Jamaica as soon as the colonials will leave them alone. My family thinks that the ending of colonialism is the beginning of the end, really. So I jar with the whole world around me, really.

**MJ:** Could you describe your sister's experience and the effect that had on you?

**SH:** Yes. My sister was older than me and had a rather tempestuous adolescence because my mother among our many other distinctive ideas thought that women were not interesting that only men were interesting because only men had power. So she and my sister had a pretty tempestuous relationship. My sister went to work and she started a relationship with a young training doctor at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica,

which had just recently opened medical school. He was a black Barbadian and my family decided that this was not on. Although she was over 21 they insisted that this stop, which, after a huge family row did. Very shortly after that my sister went into a tremendous nervous breakdown and that occurred throughout her 20's on two or three occasions. And there was very little psychiatric help in Jamaica at that time it wasn't sort of, you know, something that was available. She had ECT treatment administered by a doctor and I used to go and see her in-between. That's not the point, the point is that, you know, her life was more or less ruined. She did recover but she has never really recovered fully from that. She's still alive, living in Jamaica, in her early 80's. But it was, you know, completely traumatic experience. Now, you know, I wondered where on earth did this crisis come from and it was perfectly clear. It was a crisis created by the whole system, you know. The way our family had internalized within the family culture, within the family drama, these external ideas about colonialism and color and race and class, etc. These things had driven her crazy, let's just put it simply. And I just knew, I knew many things from that: I know first of all that she was the victim of this, the unconscious victim of the whole colonial system. She lived of the colonial family romance, yes? In a traumatic way. So that's one thing I knew.

The second thing I knew was that there was something deeply pathological about the way in which my family in particular had internalized this culture, it's ambivalent relationship to, you know, the colonial power to the rest of Jamaica, etc. to their aspirations. And the third thing I knew was that this was a kind of trap waiting for me. That, you know, unconsciously I too had been shaped by many of those ideas including the resistance to them because I was rebellious in relationship to them. But, you know, the truth about childhood is that bad things shape you, even when you resist them. The resistance to them shapes you. They become part of your internal world whether you like it or not. So, even although I was against it I realized it shaped me and I thought to myself, 'if you go away to study and you come back to Jamaica, you will never break from this strange cocoon.' Of course I couldn't envision what Jamaica would be like 20 years from then when it was independent and Jamaica became a black society – I couldn't see all that, I thought colonialism, colonial society would go on. Well, could you come back to it? And I thought if you come back to this into this fix, you will die, you die emotionally, you will perish. Something will happen and you won't be able to survive in it. And the truth is, though I didn't know it for another 10 years, maybe another 14 or 15 years, everything after that was an escape attempt. Everything after that was to get out of there. To go to these exciting other places where people read *The Wasteland* and people read *Ulysses*, where people listened to modern jazz. You know somewhere else there was another world out there, more exciting, not so provincial, not so straight jacketed by the English inheritance and by the lopsided way in which Jamaican middle class incorporated that culture. So this was a very formative moment, also a traumatic moment for me, she was absolutely terrified by this treatment and I would go and sit with her in the days in between and all she could think about was what was going to happen tomorrow and all I could think about was this and I thought: Who put her into this fix? And everybody had, unconsciously, everybody had.

**MJ:** That was a formative moment for you. How did that play into the development of your thinking in relation to culture and psychotherapy?

**SH:** Well yes I realized two things. By some odd route I had thought in my late teens that one of the things I might do was to become a psychoanalyst. I didn't know really what that meant but I tried in the six-form for instance to read science, which I was no good at all, but I did start chemistry, biology, and math in the hope but then I thought you have to be a doctor first and then a psychoanalyst. So I had a curious interest in Freud, I first read some Freud, mainly the sort of method of psychology and some of the books I came across and I had a sort of vague idea in the back of my head trying to understand my sister's situations and the family dynamics, I brought to bear a kind of psychoanalytic understanding that this was not something that people had done to one another intentionally but that this was kind of collective unconscious drama that was being lived out on another level.

So I brought a sort of psychoanalytic awareness to it but I also realized that it was not just happening, as it were, in the unconscious of the individuals involved but that it was a kind of cultural configuration we were living out as a colonial culture. That was what the drama we were engaged in.

So I learned a good deal and became interested in questions of culture. The second, but incidentally, it convinced me not be a psychoanalyst. I thought, I've had enough of mental disturbance, it's too close and I'm not ready for it. But my interest, as you know, in psychoanalysis and Freud has continued since then. But the other thing it convinced me of was that there was no really sharp distinction between the insides and the outsides. Between society and the psychic. I know you can't read one into the other. I don't believe in reading psychic motivations for what happens socially. And I don't think the psychic is simply an internalization of social lessons you know there is the unconscious between the psychic life of individuals and the cultural life of societies. Nevertheless, I think, you know, they are the two sides of the same coin. So I've never really understood the desire, for instance, of social scientists and sociologists, which I later came very much into contact with, to talk about objective processes without talking about subject – you know how those objective processes are lived subjectively. So, my notion of culture has always been of something which bridges precisely the objective social dynamics of a society and the way in which that is psychically interjected forms the interior landscape of a human being and the unconscious landscape, partly. So that's something that when I became a sociologist I always refused that distinction between the objective and the subjective.

**MJ:** You've talked about the 40's and about Jamaica moving towards independence later. How did that shape you and your earliest ambitions?

**SH:** Well, I don't think they had shaped my ambitions very much. You know my ambition was to go to university. Nobody in my family had ever been to university and my ambition also, for the reasons that I've given already, was to go abroad to study, to get a scholarship to go abroad to study. Not to study at home at the University of the West Indies as a lot of other people that I went to school with were beginning to do. I didn't

know what would follow that and I didn't think about it very carefully. So it didn't shape my ambitions very much, what it shaped was my sort of attitudes. What I imbibed was an implicit anti-colonialism from very early on. First when I went to school I was surrounded by bigger boys, boys in the six-form, who after that went on to be the political leaders of independence – Michael Manley – went on to be the poets and the novel writers. They were just waiting for independence to come to come into their own and they were the people I looked up to. And so if I had ambitions it would be to be like them and I understood at that moment that getting rid of colonialism and all it meant culturally and psychically and economically was the required beginning of everything. So I came to England as an instinctive anti-colonialist. I wasn't very much more sophisticated politically than that. Though I also knew that something very important had happened in the society in 1938. I remember the formation of the political parties after that, the formation of the trade unions, the organization of the agricultural workers in the sugar estates, the organization of the people who worked the docks and so on. I understood this was a new kind of politics emerging in Jamaica linked to a drive to independence. And that my future would be in some way caught up with it and I would come back to Jamaica is how I thought. And I would teach at the University, teach the new generation, or I would become involved in politics of Jamaican founding of a nation-state. So my aspirations, insofar as I had any, were very precise ones and were very much shaped by the emerging drive to independence and the ending of colonialism that was shaping Jamaican politics at the time.

## COMING TO ENGLAND

**MJ:** What are your memories of the passage to England as a Rhodes scholar, and what were your first impressions of England and Oxford?

**SH:** My mother brought me, to England, with an enormous steamer trunk, a felt hat and a check winter coat. We arrived in August. It was a very tempestuous journey because the famous hurricane that hit Jamaica just after we left, we encountered at sea. I have a picture of my mother coming off the deck of the banana boat that we came on. I arrived in England in the dark gray cold, somber lit light of Paddington, which is where we were staying. There were two months before I went to Oxford but my mother decided that we would take a trip and take my steamer trunk up so I went to Merton College Oxford. She delivered her son to where she always thought I belonged. Our home in Jamaica was called Merton, can you imagine? So, you know, she thought Merton College was just an extension of our home in Trevelyan Park Rd. So she delivered me – there were not many people around, actually who was around were young English students taking Oxford entrance. So I didn't meet many students then, I met aspirant students. I was delivered to my scout, Bert. And Bert took me over. Bert had been in the First World War, had been shell-shocked or gassed or something. And as soon as I looked at Bert I thought, my mother thought, 'Bert's going to look after him.' And I thought I'm going to look after Bert. And from then on Bert showed me to my double rooms; one electric fire and the bedroom has no heating at all. You know I remember in the first December looking out and breathing and I could see my breath. I thought this was an absolutely astonishing

place. Merton is a very old college. I was round the corner from Mob Quad, which is the oldest actual quadrangle in Oxford. You know, the library with chained books, can you imagine? As in the outer place just opposite the chapel we had to go across an open meadow, open all the way down Christ's Church Meadow to the river to go to the bathrooms, which were white tile about a hundred fifty yards. We used to run! And once you got there you took a book because you were going for a good long time. You were going for an hour and a half. It took a half hour to warm up, to become human. You know it was absolutely astonishing. I didn't think, I couldn't imagine how really life could go on in a place like that, Oxford. Oxford is so strange.

On the other hand, Oxford and England were vaguely familiar, familiar as in a dream. I had read romantic poetry, I had read English literature, I had read Dickens, you know. I had read Tom Brown's schooldays. I knew this place in some recesses of my fantasy life. When we traveled on the boat train, coming to London, I thought this is what countryside looks like it doesn't look like yards in Jamaica with a scrawny cow and five goats and a pig. It looks well tended with good, medieval hedges and nice looking black and white cows leaning over the hedge. I thought, 'this is Wordsworth! This is Keats, this is Shelley!' So both intensely strange and alienating and somehow familiar – I kind of knew it as in another life.

The one other thing that was so vivid in my memory is: 1951, OK, we arrived in London, staying in Paddington, Inverness Terrace, walking past Paddington Station and after Paddington Station streams of black Caribbean people. Where are they coming from? Where are they going to, much more important? Where are they going to stay? Who are they? I didn't know about the Windrush, I didn't know about the, just three years after the Windrush, really before the high point of Caribbean migration which was really '53, '54, '55, but the first migrants. And this was an absolute shock to me. First of all, trying to put myself in their position – because they're obviously not students – there were a lot of Caribbean, Asian, Africa students around who would all go to study and go back. These were people coming to work and I didn't understand what. But the other thing was very personal shock – these were the people I'd never been allowed to speak to in my own home country that I thought, well I'm going to escape from that and all that that means to my family and bloody hell, they have come to meet me. And that's the story of my life – they came to meet me and after that, you know, the people, the community that I most related to was the Caribbean community in the second diaspora but I saw that, without really understanding it, within a month of arriving in England. So whereas I thought of England as encountering the colonizer on native ground, I encountered the colonized coming out of the railway station.

**MJ:** George Lamming said that he became West Indian in Britain. Is that what happened to you?

**SH:** Yes, absolutely. I had never met other Caribbean people before. I had a met a Barbadian who taught me Classics at school but I had never met another from any other Caribbean island. You know Jamaica is very much more separated from the rest of the Caribbean, much further north. If you live in Trinidad or Barbados there's a lot of

movement in the Southern Caribbean from one island to another. So I really was rather unusual from that perspective. But, meeting Barbadians, meeting Trinidadians, a lot of Trinidadians at Oxford who had been sent there, who were civil servants, going back to manage the new colonial government. I knew more Trinidadians than Jamaicans. And I soon got to know many of the writers, you know Naipaul was at University at the same time, George Lamming was in London, Sam Selvon was in London. We formed, we constructed a West Indian identity for ourselves separate from becoming a Jamaican. I can't say I became a Jamaican, I became a West Indian and that was a very distinctive new identity. Partly because the English couldn't distinguish between Antiguan and St. Lucians – you know they called everybody Jamaicans, which was itself a kind of insult. So we thought about ourselves in West Indian terms. And the writers were creating a West Indian novel. And we were thinking very much about the West Indies after federation. We had the idea that it would be stupid for the individual islands, so small, to try to survive economically on their own. We thought a kind of federation first of all amongst the Anglophone islands and then including the Spanish and French speaking Caribbean. You know that would make a sort of political, economic entity, which was able to fend off a challenge from North America, fend off the legacy of colonialism, etc. So we were very much committed to the future of West Indian politics and when I thought about coming home it was at that time less to come home to Jamaican politics than to come home to somewhere in the Caribbean to be part of a West Indian politics. Of course it never happened because the Federation soon collapsed.

**MJ:** You mentioned those writers. What were your impressions and the friendships you developed? You also mentioned Naipaul and were there differences between them?

**SH:** Well, actually Naipaul I met and got to know but not very well. And Naipaul didn't want very much to do with other West Indians in Oxford because we had a very active West Indian society, which met regularly, talked about Caribbean politics, read the novels. So a lot of the writers from London came up to talk at the West Indian society. If there were visiting politicians or political figures we'd try to invite them to come up. There was the West Indian student center in London, which we all used to go to during the vacations. That was where I heard Lamming, Reed, and many other of the West Indian writers. I soon got, through a writer called Andrew Sarkey, I got into contact with the Caribbean voices program which was a program being run by the BBC on the BBC World Service, which really was where many of the early West Indian writers read poetry and prose, and I began to do critical work for the BBC. So really it's through London and through work at the BBC that I met the writers who would become immigrants and that Lamming writes about in *The Pleasures of Exile*.

**MJ:** At that point did you want to be a writer yourself?

**SH:** Yes, I did. That was the plan. I was also about to write a novel and I guess I've, well I gave up. I decided I really wasn't – I tried again when I was a graduate student and I wrote some poetry, etc. but I decided I really wasn't very good at it. So I gave up the ambition to do so although a lot of people would tell you that much of the way I write is like a failed writer. A writer who didn't work out. I don't mind that. It's not an ambition

that I have and I don't have regrets that I didn't become a writer. But that was really what I thought I would be. If you asked me when I was an undergraduate I would say, likely, it would be that I was going to write a novel by the time I was 25.

**MJ:** Were you involved in other political or cultural activities as a student? I mean, I think you played jazz?

**SH:** Yes, I played in a jazz band. I was very active in the West Indian Society. I was friendly with a number of people in my college who wrote literature or were Rhodes scholars or were on scholarship from the United States and they were quite important for me because they introduced me for the first time to American literature which of course Oxford did not teach. So I read for the first time Faulkner and Fitzgerald and Hemingway and even then Henry James whom I later worked on for my graduate work. And Melville and Hawthorne and you know. So I read American literature largely through them and they were an interesting group. What they did was to, they sustained my identity as a critic and that was another thing that I had an aspiration to be, a literary critic. Remember this is the high days of Leavis and Scrutiny not at all favorable at Oxford. My tutor thought Leavis was a kind of puritan barbarian but we were very serious about literature and about language and cultural values, etc. thought Leavis was terrific but we didn't like his sort of elitist in the Leavis way. We thought that Leavis and Scrutiny took literature seriously. Literature was a serious business, it wasn't something frivolous, you know, which Oxford attitude rather encouraged. So we were rather beetle-browed about it and with Americans and a few other literary students we went to the critical forum and we tried to be serious critics. We were very influenced by American new criticism at that stage, etc. So that was another kind of involvement in the literary culture. Now, when, at the end of my undergraduate period when I got second scholarship to stay on to do graduate work I decided that one of the things that I would do or could do was to confront the question of Caribbean literature and culture. When I said earlier on I didn't know where I belonged and what relationship with that culture was and in a sense in my undergraduate period I sort of reconciled that by through the activities of the West Indian Student Society and through my involvement in Caribbean literature in England. But really what Caribbean, what Jamaican culture was in Jamaica and what had formed it was something I really didn't know. So, although I started my graduate work on Henry James I spent most of my time in Rhodes House Library reading the debates in anthropology about Caribbean culture. Reading the debates about creolization and about the survivals of slavery and was this really an African survival society or had it been transformed by the English and French and Spanish influences into a kind of creole. All this Africanism the kind of center of, at the beating heart of Caribbean culture. And I read a lot of that work at that time and really what later on became Cultural studies really began for me there and with a very important re-grounding in an understanding of the structure from which I'd felt alienated by my family at an earlier stage.

**MJ:** Could you describe playing in a jazz band when you were a student?

**SH:** I was playing a very simplified version of modern jazz. You know I'd been listening to it for years and trying to play. The band consisted of a Barbadian student who was on the

bass, a Jamaican who was driving buses who played drums and another Jamaican – I think he was Jamaican – also working on Oxford transport, who played the sax. So it's a small quartet and we played in a restaurant near the bridge that goes from the station into Oxford, on Friday nights – dinner jazz. I'd always loved it. I played as it were in the sixth-form too in Jamaica. We played for weddings, we played for parties and we played at the theater. So, we were ok but it was completely frustrating because I really wasn't properly musically trained. I played largely by ear, I couldn't read music effectively, so there was a huge limit to how far you could go especially when you were trying to play modern jazz. You could play traditional jazz by improvisation but you couldn't play good modern jazz by not knowing any of the chord sequences properly and so on. So there was always a limit built into it but I loved played. While playing or rehearsing I didn't think about anything else. It's a full absorption into it, as I still remember.

**MJ:** Who were the pianists you were listening to at that time?

**SH:** I listened to the modern jazz quartet, John Lewis. I listened to Oscar Peterson. I listened to, well you know actually I was fonder myself of other instruments. I was fonder of other instruments than of the piano so I wasn't sort of myself following other pianists on piano. I listened to Monk a lot but you can't aspire to Monk because Monk is somebody who knows everything about music and then forgets it whereas I had never learned it. So I was most powerfully, I mean the instrument that moved me most is the trumpet. Which is why, although Charlie Parker is the beginning of everything, Miles Davis is for me the absolutely supreme modern jazz artist.

**MJ:** But it's also obviously a way in which you were meeting some of the Jamaicans you wouldn't have met...

**SH:** Yes, I don't quite know, I guess there was a little bit of activity around those Jamaicans who came to work in Oxford, mainly on the buses and to live in Oxford to work. I don't quite know whether the student society made contact with them or I don't know how the first contact was established but we did get to meet some of them and they became very close friends. I lived then in a student house, which we looked after ourselves, we'd become a kind of center of the new left but we'd practice in the basement of this house.

**MJ:** So, tell me about the beginnings of your political activism and how that came about.

**SH:** Well, as I say, I was a kind of instinctive anti-imperialist. I read a little Marx in Jamaica because I took A-levels twice – you had to take A-levels a second time to get a scholarship so I took A-levels twice. And the second time I took it I'd read history and literature in English and the last time I took it I took the modern history paper which was really contemporary history and there were no books. We really learned it out of reading newspaper reports in archives and listening to the radio and so on. And I read some little pamphlets put out by the British council – I think their main purpose was to inoculate the colonial intelligentsia against Marxism but what it did was to arouse considerable interest, in our class, in Marxism. So I read the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire and I read the Communist Manifesto, of course, and so on. So I'd read some Marx before.

And when I got to Oxford there was a very active political life going on – a labor club, labor society was one thing, the labor club was actually sort of more directly connected to a party. There were a lot of people in Oxford public life, speaking at the Oxford Union or going to the other clubs, etc. who were active in the political societies. Some of them went on to make political careers, of course, through that. There was a small communist party in Balliol, mainly in Balliol. Raphael Samuel, Gabriel Pierson and so on and they were a small and intense but very active group. You have to remember that this is the early stages of the Cold War. So communists are not allowed into the Labor Party, people in the labor party really act as if they're talking directly to the NKVD if they talk to Raphael Samuel. There's really a political apartheid going on and it was partly bridged by those of us who had become involved and interested in politics on the left who were neither aligned with the Communist Party nor deeply entrenched in Labor politics – not wanting to make a Labor Party career out of our lives, etc. There were a whole group of us, many of us from the developing world, who formed a kind of intermediate political arena in which a lot of discussion and debate went on. Chuck Taylor, who is a wonderful philosopher, written a book on Hegel, who is now Canadian was also in Balliol at that time and he was one of these independent Marxists who were not party-aligned, had a huge critique of Stalinism and of the Communist Party and didn't align ourselves with the Soviet Union in the Cold War but refused to obey the bans and prescriptions which the Labor Left laid down on contact with the Party. All of that broke up in '56 – the Suez crisis, Hungary, all of that broke up that frozen political landscape.

But I first entered politics knowing that we were doing something rather dangerous going to a Communist Party public meeting. But we began to talk with the Communists and I remember the point in 1954 when I had finished my undergraduate work when I decided I was going to become more involved in the debate. And I offered to do a paper for a left audience mainly organized through the Communist Party at that stage on class and classlessness, which is absolutely classic because this is a paper that recognizes the centrality of class, the question of class in politics. Plus it argues that contemporary class formations are very different from those which operated at the time when Marx was writing or even when Lenin was writing and therefore you had to modify the politics that grew out of that to take account of contemporary new class formations. Well, you know, I'm exceedingly, it takes a great deal for me to confess that I've never gone to anything else. I've been writing about how the left has to take account of contemporary historical changes in order to realize the aspirations of social justice, racial justice, equality, etc. I've been a sort of revisionist all my life.

From that early stage – it's the first paper, political talk I gave outside of the context of Caribbean politics, it's the first long essay I wrote for universities and left review and we started to edit it after '56. So, I've been – it sounds funny to say – I've been in a kind of new left position before the new left and I've never left it even though there's no new left any longer. In much the same way I've been involved in an argument about culture and the relationship with culture to power, culture to politics, before cultural studies. Although cultural studies then arose and was concerned with all that and then has left much of it behind. So there's a terrible consistency, it's like having three ideas in your life

and you go on dressing them up in different ways but you know some of those things don't change. I've never been seduced by authoritarian Communism and I was not seduced by the idea that the Soviet Union was the utopia of the left. I was not seduced by the idea that contemporary capitalism offered the opportunities of a good life or that modern capitalism did anything about imperialism and its colonial legacies. I thought that decent socialist politics had to be democratic, you couldn't win the people with you, you couldn't take the people with you, you couldn't mount a revolution by a revolutionary elite of six, kind of setting that matched to the flammable material, you know. So I've been in that in-between position, intermediary position politically and intellectually for a long time. People say it's why I think I can have my cake and eat it. I can combine what people think are impossible things to combine. I think it's possible to have a politics which reaches for equality between people but which does so by recognizing their differences. Now, you know everyone says you're either for equality or you're for difference but to be for equality through difference is a complex politics but it is actually where I am intellectually.

**MJ:** And in terms of your early thoughts on the relationship of culture to power, how did that come about and who were you arguing with?

**SH:** Well, I was arguing with an orthodox Marxism where of course the central dynamic was the economy, economics rather restricted and narrow frame. One was arguing with traditional political science where politics was about government and about political parties, about elections and about seizing power, etc. One was arguing with, I suppose, a sort of laborist political tradition, which was good on questions of equality and good on questions of democracy and so on but which was, had really no understanding of the way culture forms the raw materials out of which politics is made.

You see, it depends on what you think culture is, but at the level we're talking now, I understand culture to be the way in which human beings make sense of their world. It's about meaning. It's about the meanings which are at one end institutionalized in the greatest and inscribed in the greatest literature. That's one – culture raised to a high level. And it's the culture of conversation, the culture of daily life, the cultural of how to get on a bus. How you meet, live a meaningful life from day to day, all of that is culture.

Now, you know, you can't have politics without in that sense without culture because politics requires the background of making sense of how society works. Out of that you form a specific political program to achieve certain goals but as you achieve them you have to acknowledge that they have to become part of the culture because the subjects have to do something with it so it has to enter their mental life and their unconscious life. They have to be attached to the ideal that you're trying to sell in order to get themselves out of bed and get down to a demonstration.

Even something as simple as that requires the interweaving of meaning and also on the other hand, coming from the background of colonialism, I understood that one of the reasons why people, you know, were led to collude in some ways with their loss of freedom with their abdication of freedom was precisely because of the strength and

domination of colonial culture. You know, culture was a screen between them and their lives. So, in every way culture seems to me to be related to power. I don't mean in a narrow sense, I don't mean culture is a kind of propaganda but unless culture deals with the meaning and frames through which people understand and make sense of their lives it cannot embed itself in the body, in activity, in practice, in lived forms, in the building of institutions, in the winning of elections or political party programming or anything like that.

So I've never, although it's opposed by a number of political positions – you know lots of people would say, "What is politics to do with it? Get Labor elected. Command the state." But as Gramsci said the state is as much educative, it educates the citizen to certain forms of citizenship. It's as much that as telling people how much taxes they will pay or whether they can drive on the left hand side of the road or not. It's about the winning of consent which you can only do through ideas and by ideas I don't mean concepts or philosophy, I mean the living ideas which people exchange in their everyday life without what Gramsci would call the intellectual functions which every human being perform in so far as we think before we move a glass from here to there.

We are intellectual because the mental function is intervened in the simply material act we are about to perform. So culture in that sense is everywhere. Then, at a later stage culture is divided into popular culture and high culture and philosophical culture, etc. But before you get to the compartments I'm principally interested in culture as the whole, as the meaning, it is as cultural– if you say the economy is fundamental because we've got to reproduce our material life, then culture is fundamental because we have to reproduce and sustain our symbolic life.

## THE NEW LEFT AND NEW LEFT REVIEW

**MJ:** How would you describe what the New Left was about and the impetus, the moment in which it emerged?

**SH:** Well I've sort of hinted at what it was. It was very much formed by, you might say, a plague on both your houses. Or really more by looking for some space between the two alternatives, you know, that seemed to lie between the world really, which did so throughout the Cold War. Either Capitalism or some form of state Communism and we were looking for an alternative, more humane, more just, more inclusive, you know, etc. Less racially driven, less patriarchal in its forms than either of these two alternatives.

We tried to insert ourselves between the two camps, which is how we experienced politics in the Cold War as two opposed, armed alternatives, ways of life, really. But the moment of the New Left is really 1956 and that is because 1956 is the period, is the moment when, first of all the British revert to an imperial role that everybody thought had disappeared forever and the collusion with the French and Israel march into the Suez Canal – gunboat diplomacy – diplomacy at the end of a barrel of a gun in the middle of the 50's, what is that? We'd just all read John Strachey's book called "End of Empire" and here was empire

revivendus as we saw again in the Falkland's. Empire, it's an unconscious that keeps coming back.

Ok, so on the one hand we were led to say modern capitalist societies are still as capable of the imperial move even although they might be in the process of giving up colonizing society and occupying territories and governing them from Whitehall. Nevertheless imperialism is built into a capitalist system that aspires to be global in its reach – it's going to happen again and again. And at the same time, of course, the Hungarian revolution, which was the first, well it wasn't the first because there was breaks before in Poland and then afterwards in Czechoslovakia, but the Hungarian revolution was the first time a satellite East European Communist state tried to break free of the Soviet yoke.

And, you know, the people who were involved in that, the circles around Lukacs and the students in Budapest and the spontaneity of the movement, you know, the opposing Soviet, you know that wonderful picture of the Hungarian student putting the flower in the barrel of a Russian gun. This is New Left territory. This the opposition to the armed camps, you know, the possibility of a new kind of politics, the possibility of hope not driven by an authoritarian state or exploited by an imperialist, capitalist market. So that's the moment, yes, and it creates the two events, mark out the two limits of the New Left. No to state communism, no to imperialist capitalism and therefore then the struggle is to define some genuine alternative way of organizing society which is both democratic and socialist and racially more just.

**MJ:** You've also said that the New Left was driven by voices that didn't quite fit into the society. I was wondering who you're thinking of?

**SH:** Well, I say that more of the period at Oxford. The group that I talked about before, yes, were people in the middle, like Chuck Taylor. But there were a lot of people from Africa, people from India, people also other students from the Caribbean and from Southeast Asia whose politics weren't defined by this Cold War opposition. And we formed a thing called The Socialist Society, which the Communists joined and people from the Labor Club joined. So, you know, it was a kind of refutation of the bans and prescriptions 'don't talk to the Communists,' etc. And in that space there were a lot of people who were not British, of course.

So that was the moment when it was very open to the Third World, the Third World politics, the development of the Third World, etc. There's another moment when the New Left is heavily involved in the campaign for nuclear disarmament when the New Left is the most active force arguing for what is called positive neutralism, that is to say arguing for an alignment with abandoned powers again, which, you know, tried to form a third space between Communism and Capitalism. But the New Left itself in its British manifestation was not very internationalist and not very multicultural – pretty British actually.

**MJ:** I was going to ask you about your differences then with people within that movement, I mean was that something you were trying to inject?

**SH:** It was something which I was trying to inject but not very much because remember, you know, remember that the race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 is the sort of birth of post-war racial politics in Britain. In the late 50's and early 60's between then and the election in Smethwick when the conservative candidate declares himself to be openly a racist in 1964 when the race issue enters official party politics – this is before Enoch Powell in '68.

Now between those two moments, black politics is very insipient. It's nascent, it has no public forum, it has no national forum. People are resisting in Notting Hill, they're resisting in Nottingham, they're resisting in Smethwick, they're resisting in Wolverhampton. But there's no unified movement. So there isn't yet what we would think of as clearly anti-racist British black politics to relate to. So what we related to were all the struggles outside but then everybody related to that – to Soweto, to Kenya, to Indonesia, to Burma – you know all those terrible early post-colonial struggles some of them very vicious. They've been forgotten and we talk about decolonization, about the speed of decolonization, we've forgotten some very early, terrible episodes but that you can imagine.

The New Left, whoever they were, were very identified with those struggles. So I think what you're saying is, 'was I active in trying to make a connection between New Left politics and of British Black politics?' and I'm really saying that there wasn't as such a national British Black politics to relate to. There were local struggles but there wasn't yet a national black politics to relate to. The murder of Kelso Cochrane, which was an astonishing public display of solidarity among black people – I mean it's the biggest black demonstration, that funeral cortege, you know, was an incredible sight. It was almost the first time when, you know, there was a national black presence on the streets around an issue. The issue was – a black man had been murdered at a street corner in Ladbroke Grove by four or five white youths almost of which the Stephen Lawrence story so many years later is almost a straight repetition.

But that's when people become aware – not just that their community black struggle is going on but that there's a national black politics emerging. It's later, it's in relation to Marxism today, in the late 70s and 80s that when there is now a national Black politics, there's an anti-racist politics going very actively in the 70s and 80s that I'm more aware of myself as trying to make a bridge between a British related left politics and that, not so much in the early period.

**MJ:** And what was your personal experience of 1958 and the Notting Hill resistance?

**SH:** Well, we were involved – the New Left ran a club that had meetings every Monday in 100 Oxford Street which was a jazz club. We used to bring Tony Crossland and Hugh Gaitskill and leaders of Third World struggles, Tom Mboya, etc. people from South Africa to speak at this place but in addition to that we had a clubhouse where the New Left was edited in Soho and that become an organizing center for an intervention in Notting Hill when the race riots broke out. I was the younger generation in the New Left, I forgot to say, really, that after 1956 we started at Oxford, a thing called University Left Review and that was very much edited by the Oxford group.

So the four editors were myself, Raphael Samuel, Charles Taylor – that I've talked about before, Canadian – and Gabriel Pierson who is a literary scholar. And we were the sort of editors, the sort of spokespersons for this whole larger enclave who had been debating politics and also politics and culture because, you know, one of the key texts that we debated at that time were of course *The Uses of Literacy* the first chapters of *Culture and Society*, etc. so this was a group very interested in the interface between culture and politics.

Ok, this group then merged with another group, slightly older than ourselves – people like Edward Thompson, John Saville, Dorothy Thompson and so on, John Rex. Some of whom had either been in the Communist Party and either left or been expelled when they identified themselves with the Hungarian Revolution and had an anti-Stalinist critique, etc. They were thrown out of the party or they left. And they were a slightly older generation – they were our seniors. The two journals came together and in 1960 founded the *New Left Review* and really one of that older generation should have edited *New Left Review* but actually they had been in, there's a famous phrase by Lady Eden that the sewer canals ran through her bedroom, well you know politics ran through Edward Thompson's front bedroom from about 1956 until about 1960. And they were not in a position to take that on. And stupidly in my illusions, muggins here decided to take it on. Which was, you know, it was not right really.

I wasn't sufficiently bedded into British politics and it was very difficult for me. You can imagine editorial meetings in which I'm the editor, ok? And the room is full – Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson, John Saville, John Rex, Peter Worsley, Alistair McIntyre. These senior figures and I'm trying to put a journal together. So it didn't last very long – I left in 1961. But they were my conferees. Now, Edward Thompson was the leading critic of Stalinism inside the Communist Party, had been a member of the historian's group in the Communist Party – a very creative group – with Edward Thompson, Hilton, Hill, Hobsbawm. Great Marxist historians formed this really very independent group, very free of the party. So Edward embodied, you know, the break from Stalinism into the New Left. Raymond Williams we had met in Oxford because we got to know him quite early on and he showed us two chapters from *Culture and Society*, at a very early stage. And we knew that Raymond was working on this very interesting route back to politics through culture with *Culture and Society* and then *The Long Revolution*.

So, you know, there were two kind of heroes of mine and their books – on the one hand, *The Making of the English Working Class*, which as you know is a wonderful book on class but it is a very cultural view of class if you really read it. That class is not defined only by its relation to the relations of production but to the whole formation of consciousness and cultural expression. And Raymond, on the other hand, with this very deep, long and embedded understanding of the historical epochs through which British society had developed and the cultural meaning of those different stages. So they were very critical figures. John Rex was a figure from South Africa who had left because of apartheid. Peter Worsley was an anthropologist who had worked mainly in Southeast Asia. They were people who came together around CND, around the Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament and around sustaining the work of the journal, the New Left Review and writing for it most of the time.

**MJ:** What do you remember? What were your sort of personal relationship with them and your memory of those editorial meetings with EP Thompson and Raymond Williams and so on? What was the dynamic?

**SH:** These are tender moments. My relationship with Edward was very fraught. He's very powerful, very charismatic figure and that's kind of embodiment of a certain kind of English dissenting radicalism with a very imaginative reach and really people think of Edward because of *The Making of the English Class* as a historian but actually he taught literature as much as he taught history. And you know his work on Blake, his work on the romantics, you know, this was as much part of who he was as a study of the economics of the English working class and their formation.

So a very charismatic figure who had had his own journal, the *New Reason*, it wasn't his but he was and Dorothy Thompson were the leading figures in maintaining *The New Reason* with John Saville who had also been in the Communist Party Historian's Group with them. And what's more, they regarded the founding, the location of *The New Left Review* in London, in Soho, it's like as a kind of implicit sellout to Metropolitan London. I mean they were rooted in Yorkshire, in Halifax, where you can still see the smoke coming out of the chimneys, there were still textile mills. If you went to CND meetings, you know I went up and down the country speaking at CND meetings for about three years. I spoke nearly every single weekend – I'd go to Halifax and then there'd be an editorial board meeting.

I'd never seen – you know I understood Oxford, I understood London, I understood the South but Halifax is a completely different thing altogether, you know? So, to come to the peace movement in Harrogate, these people had been in the Communist Party for 25 years and who had long connections with the co-operative movement, with the local trade unions, with the trades council, the location... I say that because Edward represented, from the beginning, a kind of critique of how *New Left Review* was evolving. He spoke from that place, he spoke to London, the wen of the center of vice down there, he spoke to us from afar.

And, you know, of course he was perfectly right in reminding us that England didn't stop at Edgware and all of that. So it wasn't a question of who was right or wrong. It was just the difficulty for a very young person from a colonial background who'd had a very particular route into British politics to be, to confront the authority of a figure like that. And there was a kind of feeling that the *New Left Review* was kind of trendy, it had come out of Oxford, it was full of all this stuff about culture and interested in the media and popular culture and jazz and what did all that have to do with socialism? So they were suspicious about our tendency and the fact that I was the editor must have made it seem as if that tendency was in command. The London club was the biggest club, taking place in Oxford Street, getting all these big speakers, do you know what I mean? There's a kind of provincial-metropolis tension there.

To say something about the other figure, Raymond, because these are the two pillars of my political formation, really. There wasn't anything of that sort with Raymond. I mean Raymond was the easiest person to talk to, you know, he brought no baggage, no agenda, into our conversation. But Raymond was also a difficult figure for somebody like me to egg out. I had never really heard Raymond Williams speak. I mean he spoke as if from the bottom of a Welsh mine. A deep sonorousness located inside a particular part of organized working class. His father, from the Welsh part of the labor movement, which is very distinctive itself. Of course, he had been to Cambridge, he was a professor at Cambridge, he never left Cambridge, he wrote all these books from a location in Cambridge, you know, which was a very peculiar thing.

But when you met Raymond that wasn't who you met, you met this figure out of another kind of history. Now, I greatly respected that history. He was closer to some of my interests in the connection between culture and politics but I couldn't be a person like him, do you understand me? He was important for my thought, for my feeling, for my political engagement, but he couldn't be a role model. Neither of them could be role models because of the one missing element: neither of them were black. Neither of them knew the colonial thing, neither of them had been formed by the colonial fantasy, neither of them had been formed by anti-colonialism. So it wasn't any fault of theirs, but I was just in some different space. So the tensions were partly perfectly explicable because of the location of these new Oxford lads who were boning in on mass politics and, on the other hand, perfectly intelligent at a more unconscious level.

**MJ:** Did you actually enjoy Oxford?

**SH:** No, I didn't really enjoy it, at all and I haven't come to think better of it since. But that's not to say that it wasn't very formative, very influential. It shaped my life. But almost all the important things that happened sort of after the first two years or so, happened against what I would call the spirit of Oxford, the main spirit of Oxford. It was not a place that was particularly caught up in the questions of colonial struggle and so on. We were very involved in that. It wasn't a place of the left except in some of the political clubs and so on but I became very involved in that.

In terms of how literature was taught it was rather different from the rather rigorous, critical practice that I was interested in. I didn't like the social milieu. I didn't like the place of upper class performance, which is was very much in those days. I hadn't really appreciated, outside of England how critical Oxbridge was at the pinnacle of the British educational class system. You know, I didn't realize it was the formation of the political elite, as it were, and of the social elite too. I hadn't at all understood what Oxford connections could do for you in later life, you know. I've watched, since I left Oxford, I've watched all these people soar into the front benches, to CEO positions in corporate businesses, etc. in the center of government, straight from a sort of Oxford Labor Party or Conservative Party Oxford Union career.

So the encounter with Oxford was an encounter with a certain kind of intellectual and cultural power. And I didn't like that. And I couldn't stand that particular high-pitched way which in those days Oxford undergraduates talked to one another. You know, in tea rooms or coffee bars, they talked as if the entire world would be listening to what they were saying. So their voice had to be pitched, braying, to the rest of the world and everybody should really stop talking and listen to what they have to say. It's a kind of assumption about their importance in the world. And since, what Oxford consolidated in my mind was a sense of Britain, a sense of absolute superiority, that everybody else had to listen to Britain and here was the political class in Britain who had to listen to it so it was a very nerve-racking experience.

I've been back to Oxford, you know, I can count the occasions on the fingers of my two hands and most often to Ruskin College, Oxford, the trade union college. And now, I'm an honorary fellow at my college, at Merton, which is really a wonderful gesture from them since I've never been very polite about Oxford, but I don't go very often.

## EARLY TEACHING

**MJ:** What kind of teaching did you do before Birmingham?

**SH:** I did a range of teaching. Immediately after I left Oxford in '57 I went to teach as a secondary modern schoolteacher, supply teacher in South London around the Oval. Interestingly already schools in that area of South London were quite mixed so I had a lot of black kids in my class and in the school generally. I taught for the Oxford extra-mural delegacy, funny name but it's essentially Oxford extra-mural studies, which is what Raymond taught for, of course. He was the extra-mural tutor for that delegacy in Hastings and I taught extra-mural classes in South London – in a number of places in South London. I taught a class for a long time at Tunbridge Wells on literature, on literature and translation, on the Russian novel, on all sorts of things.

It was a wonderful group and I used to think as I travelled on the train there on Friday evenings, "I'm going into Edward Heath's constituency to spread the gospel." I then taught often for the British Film Institute whose education department was just developing. There was no teaching of film or television in universities at all. I was appointed the first person to teach film and media studies I think in higher education at the Chelsea College of Advanced Technology in London that has since become Chelsea College part of London University. But we taught, you know, television and film as part of what is called complimentary studies to cultivate the scientists.

So I taught film for the British educational Film Institute. We used to make up a selection of slides and clips so we could give a lecture. I gave a lecture on the Western in Brixton prison, you know which went down a bomb. I think the screws thought it was a rather touch and go situation and since I was completely unlettered in prison lore, I couldn't tell who was a screw and who was a policeman and who was a double-murderer. Anyhow cops and robbers, you know, John Ford flooded across the screen and we lectured on

popular cinema and the French new wave – Godard, Antonioni and so on. So it was a variety of different kinds of teaching.

**MJ:** What was your interest in film, television, allied media as it was then called, and what made you think these subjects were really worthy of study?

**SH:** Well, I was interested in them because they were the modern means of the creation of popular culture, of a culture of the masses, in a way. So given that I have this rather expansive definition of culture, they were, what was happening to the new publics for television and what could happen in relation to film for students that studied it seriously, you know these were the culture makers of the future. So I thought the idea that you could teach in a secondary modern school preparing kids who had no hope of an academic future, going into – the majority of kids in my school were going to the print, they were going to work for the Daily Express. They were going to work for the vans that delivered newspapers, The Daily Mirror, south of the Thames.

You know, what were you preparing these kids for? If you wanted to prepare them for any kind of critical life, you didn't just give in to whatever was offered, kind of life of pure appetite, well you had to engage them with these things because they were going to get their information from television. They were going to get their picture of the United States through Hollywood, through the cinema. So the idea that you could have a serious educational program that didn't involve a critical look at the mass media seemed to me untenable, and stills seems to me untenable. So I was interested in them partly because of that reason.

I was interested in the cinema because I think the cinema is, you know, better than that. I mean television's impact on the mass audience is one thing, and not to say there aren't good programs on television, of course there are, but the cinema is really the high art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And so not to know that is like not to know Dickens, it's like not reading Shakespeare. Not to know the great architects of the modern cinema is just not to be educated, I don't think. So one of the things that drives me absolutely wild is this continuing legacy amongst educationalists and broadcasters, etc, now in 2003, about mass media courses are Mickey Mouse courses. All of these are broadcasters themselves who don't want a critical word said, you know, they just want the right to tell the public what to think and they don't think anybody should ever say, "What are you doing? What are you showing them? What are you leaving out? What are you omitting, what are you not showing them?" This is really bad faith, I have to say bad faith.

Every time I hear a discussion on education, which says a critical study of the culture of everyday life in the modern world is not a serious pursuit, I think that is an act of bad faith. It's not to say that all media courses are wonderful anymore than all literatures courses are all wonderful. Or all history courses – there's a lot of rubbish taught in all disciplines. But the idea that, for itself, not to engage the contemporary culture, so profoundly changing those post-war generations – the first wave of rock 'n roll, the first wave of new popular music, the transformation of what youth meant into teenage

adolescence. Not to engage with the forces shaping that was a dereliction of educational duty I had felt. So I was drawn to this field partly in that way.

One of the things people say about my work is that I write about popular culture. I don't write all that much about popular culture, actually, but I would defend popular culture, as sphere of serious critical work, to the death.

**MJ:** And did you meet like-minds in the BFI (British Film Institute), that gave rise to your book "The Popular Arts"?

**SH:** Oh yes, there were people. The most important person was a guy called Paddy Whannel, a Scotsman, a wonderful golfer, a great aficionado of jazz, who also ran the education department and he really started what was the popular educational program in film appreciation. It wasn't taught anywhere but you would go to adult education centers or conference, teacher's conferences and so on, and have a session on film and show some actual film because he, like everybody else, was a critic in the post-Leavis mold that is to say you have to look at the thing in itself, you have to hear some of the language, you have to look at some of the images, you have to see how they're put together, you have to give the aesthetic dimension its true weight. You have to understand that form is also a carrier of meaning but in addition to that you have to get through that to the social fabric that's being represented, re-presented through this new medium.

And Paddy Whannel was an extraordinary person, really. He was a working class Scot and obsessed by golf, but in the Scottish mode where it is a popular game as you know. He was an art teacher who got interested in film really as all of us did through the love of the cinema, rather than in any professional way. He went to work at the British Film Institute in the education department and started this work to teach about film for a wider kind of audience critically. But he was tremendous fun and I started to spend weekends with himself, his wife, his young son who is now in cultural studies, actually a very good critic of sport. I used to spend Sundays with them, I used to spend Christmases with them and we simply looked at film, looked at magazines, listened to Billie Holliday, listened to Coleman Hawkins, listened to Ben Webster. He really introduced me to that generation of jazz players sort of just before the modern jazz. That was where his tastes lay. But he introduced me to it and we just talked about it. The Popular Arts grew out of these intimate conversations while Paddy slowly absorbed a glass of whiskey and I would stay overnight and we'd read the Sunday papers and then we'd start again and we'd listen to Ben Webster and listen to Billie Holliday. It was the kind of personal feast, you know. And so we'd say, "well, we'd better write some of this up because teachers would benefit from hearing this conversation, because they don't know how to talk about these things with their students." So he was a marvelous person from that point of view. And then he came onto the board at the New Left Review and helped to develop our television work – the more institutional work on television. But he was a very great friend and his death was a great loss to me.

But I would say that cinema studies and film education, which by the late 70s and 80s is a huge, ongoing area of theoretical work, begins in these very small beginnings to get film

teaching into schools, into teachers, into adult classes where no formal recognition has ever been made. You couldn't get a degree in film studies in those days.

## **RICHARD HOGGART AND CCCS**

**MJ:** How did you meet Richard Hoggart and become involved with the Birmingham Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies?

**SH:** Well, *The Uses of Literacy* was really about how British working class culture was being transformed by these new cultural forces. By the new magazines, by teenage literature, by the coming of television, by the kind of the Americanization of British culture in the post-war period. And since that is also the period when American capitalism becomes dominant, it's an economic and cultural dominance of Britain, that's been part of what won the war then, in this sense, loses the peace, loses what happens afterwards. So, "*The Use of Literacy*" made a big impact in Oxford. I edited a small magazine for the Labor Club, a magazine called *Clarion* in, I should think in 1957, which was entirely devoted to the uses of literacy and to the new angry young men literary phenomenon.

So his book made a big impact. Then, it came very closely up against Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*. And *The Long Revolution* is even more important, in my view, than *Culture and Society*, because it is where Raymond attempts to theorize culture, you know. He uses language which I wouldn't use. He uses the notion of communication a lot where I talk about meaning. But it's where he reaches for a definition of culture other than high culture, elite culture, the best that has been thought and said in the world, and so on – a more anthropological, a more social definition of culture.

These two books had a big impact on those of us interested in the relationship between culture and politics, obviously, though it has to be said that Hoggart was not a very political person, but he was writing about what was at issue then – namely, what had happened to the working class? Where was the working class going? Was it still a force of change? Or was it itself being embourgeoisified, being made middle-class and therefore, to use a phrase from Hoggart's book, were the springs of social action being unbent, the social forces being unraveled, transformed and unraveled?

There's a moment when the Labor Party debates the impact of these social changes on its politics when it starts to lose to the Conservatives and Hugh Gaitskill says, "we have been rendered out of touch with our base supporters by the telly, the fridge, the motor car and the television screen." These are the forces. So it is a very political question in the broader sense, a political cultural question. If the defenses that the British working class had built up over many years – the trade union movement, the cooperative movement, a sense of working class solidarity in the community around mining and around the railways and around steel and so on. If this culture, which underpinned the politics of labor was disintegrating, what would underpin it? It's still a very relevant question after all.

So, you know, these two books made... Then University Left Review discovered the Hoggart had never met Raymond Williams and Raymond never met Hoggart. So we staged a conversation between them, which we published in ULR 3 (University Left Review 3) and that was the first time they had ever met and they talked about their respective (backgrounds) – they come from very different working classes, you know, from Leeds and from the Welsh valleys, border country. Raymond very much from a traditional labor home, somebody involved in the labor movement. Hoggart brought up by women, mainly, by his aunts and so on. So very different, but a very interesting conversation. So that brought the two of them together. Then Hoggart had a lot of publicity when he testified at the Lady Chatterley trial. As a result of that, when he moved to Birmingham, he wanted to go on doing uses of literacy type work instead of just doing literary scholarly work. And he got some money from the head of Penguin Books to put into this and he decided to set up a sort of research center. I was teaching at Chelsea and he asked me if I would be willing to come and help him set it up. And I went in, I think, March 1964 and we took our first graduate students in October.

**MJ:** And how did you find working with him personally?

**SH:** Well that was a very easy relationship. We were very different kinds of people, of course, with very different histories and backgrounds, but I don't think we ever had harsh words about anything really. We knew we were in a very new venture, we knew we were doing something which wasn't likely to be completely approved of by the literary establishment or by the powers that be in the university, etc. We knew we were tricky working on popular culture, we knew that especially people came to the center interested in questions of culture and politics as they were bound to do. This was awkward political territory to be venturing into. He's not a very political person, I would say. His sympathies are on the left but he's not a political activist in that sense. He's not a very theoretical person either. He comes out of – he's not a Leavisite in a narrow sense – but he comes out of that tradition of attentive to these words in this order, which is very much the T.S. Eliot, Leavis tradition – you must hear the language, listen to the words. If you say something, if you make a general judgment about what Lawrence is doing, you must be able to show that there is a passage in which this is what is happening in the language. That kind of close criticism applied to popular culture was really what he was wanting to do, and that was sort of what I was wanting to do at that stage too. The Popular Arts is very like that and had only just come out. So we travelled a long distance and in sort of different directions, really. But the center, I suppose the center changed considerably at the end of the 60s when he went for a time to UNESCO and I became the acting director and then the director. He decided not to come back and I became the director. And it went in a more theoretical, more quasi-Marxist, more conceptual direction.

**MJ:** And this is the direction you wanted it to go into?

**SH:** Yeah, I wasn't interested in setting up a Marxist center. What I was interested in is being able to pursue those theoretical ideas, which allowed us to deepen our understanding of the connection between culture and politics. And, you know, I think that writers in the Marxist tradition I'd say that's precisely what they've done. Whether it

was Benjamin or Adorno or Lukacs or Gramsci, they had been interested, a certain tradition particularly in Western Marxism, had been interested precisely in this question of culture and power. On the dimensions of power which are carried in culture rather in the economy or in the state. And I thought that had to be what it was about. I thought the center had to be – I mean you could do ten empirical studies, you know – we started doing a study of the press immediately after the war and people started to do particular work on Orwell and so on but what gave it a frame, we didn't have the conscious ambition to create a discipline, that was never our idea but we had to give a name and a frame to this sort of work, what was this sort of work? I remember a discussion with Richard Hoggart about whether we should call it an institute or a center for cultural studies and I said, "It can't be an institute because there's nothing institutionalized about it." It hardly has a couple of pounds in the bank to buy some books, you know. It's housed in a tiny Quanset hut on the edge of the campus – we occupied all the most peripheral buildings on the Birmingham campus for about 10 years. So it couldn't be an institute, but it was a center, a rallying point, where people interested in this kind of question, this set of questions, could come and work. Well if you want to create a center, then in addition to supervising individual's theses and getting them to talk about their research work and to provide a kind of theoretical frame well where? There's no theoretical frame, there's no cultural studies which could provide that frame. So literally in the sort of weekly seminars which I ran and which after Richard left became much more important, central, everybody took it, they were really big, exciting intellectual occasions. Well, you know, we read some sociological literature, perhaps that will tell us. Some Marxism – I mean what's the problem with the economic emphasis in Marxism, which doesn't allow it to deal with culture properly. Some sociology, well that's difficult on another side but we get a great deal about culture from Max Weber and from Durkheim. So we read Leavis and we made the people who came to us were from a number of different disciplines and we made them read the first three chapters of *The Long Revolution* and read *The Uses of Literacy* and that expanded when Gramsci in the 70s, a lot more of this work was more explicitly related to the structuralist Marxism and structuralism and semiotics and they had to read Althusser and had to read Gramsci, etc. So we created a sort of, it wasn't an orthodoxy, but we created an intellectual milieu, a sort of matrix from which who people were doing individual studies, could draw.

**MJ:** And because questions about high and low culture are still raging, what was your approach to that and the whole question of making value judgments in popular culture?

**SH:** The book *Popular Culture* was still at the point of being fascinated by value judgments, recognizing that we were applying critical procedures which had developed in relation to serious literature and high culture and philosophy to the underground culture, nevertheless we were most interested in getting students to discriminate. This was work, really that teachers could use in schools. They could teach my chapter on advertising or they could teach Paddy Whannel chapter on the Western and they could show the flyer from the film institute and could conduct a discussion about why a John Wayne western was not as good as John Ford western. So it was still training a critical sensibility, not just swallowing popular culture whole. But not refusing it on elitist, canonical grounds but really engaging with it.

And I think behind that was already a kind of incipient theory on my part, which is that what has happened in modernism is a collapse of the distinctiveness of different genre. If you want to ask what is an exciting novel, you cannot just look at the novels that are reviewed in the TLS. The most exciting novel may also be a work of science fiction, or an Elmore Leonard thriller. There is a kind of transvaluation of the old values, a kind of disconnection between the genre in which serious works appear and the seriousness of the subject matter. You can't come in with the prescribed canonical boundaries already in play. Shakespeare is not good because he's Shakespeare; he's not good because people have reverentially worshiped his work, or studied it, or corrected every comment in it for 400 years. He is good because he has something incredible to say; because he uses the language in a richer way than anybody else uses it. That's why. Not because, anybody who was trying to entertain their American friends would take them to the Globe as an outing. So we try to kind of break up the landscape, the canonical landscape, which drew the distinction between literature and popular forms of film and television etc. Good work, by which we came increasingly to mean interesting work. You are quite right that there is a kind of relativism, a kind of relativisation, of value judgments, which goes on in the course of opening up critical work to this broad cultural field. We were more inclined to say, that this is good of its kind. This is a great novel of its kind. But then that is also a fine novel, though its of a very different kind. Perhaps the other novels of that sort do not pose a great tradition, but they are really interesting, or there are interesting moments in them. I think that this is, I am astonished that this debate still goes on now, to tell you the absolute honest truth. I don't understand it. I don't understand how in a world where Brick Lane is an extremely interesting novel, where Martin Amis writes about the most kind of popular and degraded topics in the world. Where is this elite culture that everybody thinks, I don't know where they think it exists, I don't know where it is being taught. Of course there is a great deal of rubbish on television. It doesn't require a very articulated and developed cultural framework to be able to say that this is another example of the same rubbish I saw last night. But you see a really interesting program and you say that is a popular program, touching popular life, popular experience today, and it really says something wonderful; the characters are really interesting. I'm absorbed by it. It's not simple minded, it's not playing the stereotypes back to me. Well this is something worthwhile in the culture; something worthwhile has happened there. Before you categorize it, before you pin it back, its just television, let's talk about it. So one does lose the value judgment emphasis of an earlier kind of Leavisite approach to popular culture. The value question doesn't disappear because you don't just swallow everything that is offered to you, but that value judgments are more about form, but also about social value, about the social importance of the theme being talked about. And that matters also, its part of why you call it great, you know. Think of novels of Tolstoy, you don't think they are great just because he is a great writer, he writes marvelously, you think its great because he talks about war and peace. He gives you an incredible insight into war and peace meant for a whole society, an entire society, at one moment at the end of the nineteenth century. So its not a question of sort of looking for the social message, but about the centrality of the experience being handled, then of course you're interested, handled how, handled how well, how well is the form used, is it creatively used, is it breaking with what we have seen in this tradition before. There are all kinds of ways of

mounting a quite rigorous critical account of culture; its not nonsense at all, its not a minority trivial interest. But it doesn't rest so much on inherited conventional judgments arranged in a canon of the great literature or canon of great art.

**MJ:** What is your view, you talked a little about media studies in particular being derided, but of the continuing attacks on cultural studies as a field of inquiry

**SH:** Well, I think a number of things about that. First of all I think we were too successful too fast. We emerged at a moment of real critical explosion in western intellectual life. Culture studies has to be seen in the context of post-colonial studies, of feminism and psycho-analysis, of structuralism, of semiotics, of post-structuralism, of Foucault. There is a massive epistemic shift, which sometimes is called the post-modern, which I don't particularly like that as a characterization of the shift, but you can't ignore that fact that in the seventies, sort of in the wake of '68, there is an intellectual explosion. Culture studies is part of that formation. It sort of came first, earlier than many of the others. Its impact, then, on the traditional disciplines was pretty deep. It de-centered sociology, sociology in a funny sense has never recovered. It de-centered literary studies because all of a sudden literary studies were all about theory, literary theory being taught at Oxford and Cambridge, professors in literary theory, can you imagine. My teacher would be spinning like a pinwheel at the thought of that. So there is a huge transformation in intellectual life in which culture studies is a part. But I think a lot of people were envious of the slight trendiness, I don't quite know how to put it, of the gloss that surrounded cultural studies. We can cross boundaries, we are interdisciplinary, you are trapped in your disciplines, you know. We're on the moving front here, we are at the edge and once they'd picked themselves off the floor, recovered, absorbed a great deal of cultural studies, they then turned around and said we've been doing this all the time. Sociology now says, we've always done culture. It's such a travesty. I've done media studies, you know, in which people did what was called content analysis – what is the content of a message on television – in which they would count the number of times people appeared, you know. The fact that this was organized in a narrative that had a beginning, a middle and an end and that this imposed a meaning on the frame of the story you're telling though you call it the news, that idea of form was completely absent. So when sociology tells me now, "we've always done culture we just didn't make a song and dance about it," I think this is the cry of the late converts, the very late converts. But I'm not surprised then that they pay cultural studies back for having destabilized them in the way in which it plus these other intellectual transformations did. And I sort of, I should add, that a lot of things that came to be called cultural studies didn't have anything to do with it as far as I was concerned. In the United States cultural studies flourished extensively but only some people were doing really serious work on what I would call culture and power. You know the rest were doing their fifteenth reading about the Simpsons, the forty-fifth reading of Women's Magazine. That kind of formalism in cultural studies has done the discipline no good at all. So we, of course, can be criticized if you only go looking for the bad work you can be criticized for that but I think we are partly complicit in the attacks which are made on us. But I think now there is still serious work to be done in cultural studies though it is very different from the work that was done in the 60s and 70s, very different now, I would say.

## CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE

**MJ:** I wondered what your understanding of Caribbean culture brought to your approach to cultural studies?

**SH:** Well, as I think I tried to say in answer to an earlier question that I had gone to the question of Caribbean culture and its formation trying to understand the legacy of African culture and the impact of the plantation culture on the society, then the impact of the dominant colonial culture whether those were English or French or Spanish or Portuguese, and the distinctiveness now. I became convinced then that at base Caribbean culture is a creole culture. What I mean by that is that its distinctiveness arises from the number of influences from different places which it has taken in. Not on a sort of equal basis of course because this is a colonized, it was a slave society, then a colonized society. So the relations of power you see have always influenced how the culture impacted, how much of it was taken in, how much of it was resisted. Then when you say resisted, well, resisted from where? Well resisted from other culture sources, resisted from Africa, resisted from the plantation itself, resisted from colonization. So, you see when later I talk about culture and power, I'm interested in Caribbean culture as a formation, as a result of power relations, relationships of power over a long historical period. Well that I sort of re-engaged when I was a graduate student. Now when it came to looking at the changes in British culture in the post-war period in the New Left and in early cultural studies, I suppose the way in which I thought about culture reflected some of those ideas from my engagement with Caribbean culture. In this sense that I now no longer understood culture as primordial. I didn't think the culture of Africa, an African tribe, is now what it was four hundred years ago, that it will always be the same, that culture is unchanging, that culture is what writes the scripts of individual lives, subordinates individual lives to the history of the group, group identity, etc. and largely cultures are unchanging. This is a kind of essentialist conception of culture, which being interested in the Caribbean would not allow me to hold because the Caribbean is a culture of peoples none of whom belong in the Caribbean. People who belong in the Caribbean were Indians who were wiped out by the Spaniards in the first 50 years of colonization. Everybody else whose made Caribbean culture comes from somewhere else – from Africa, from India, from China, from Pakistan, from France, from Britain, from Spain, from Portugal. So, you know, it's already the notion that all cultures are to some extent diasporic, de-centered. They're not a continuation of the ever going same. They have long continuities, of course, because culture always looks back to its tradition, where its come from, or its sacred books, or its leading prophets, etc. or its major writers, or its great philosophers. But they're always worked on and gradually change. So my conception of culture was always of something which is changing. Not radically. I don't believe, I've never believed in the absolute moment of break. So when I went to Cuba in 1960 for The New Left, people said, "This is year one. From here socialist man begins. Nothing that has happened here has ever happened before." It's not true. Cuba went on, like Russia went on, being partly what it was before the revolution. So I don't believe in absolute breaks and don't believe in no change at all. And that conception of culture I did bring to bear on the quite new work that I was doing on British society and Americanization and so on.

But then when racial politics began to develop again after civil rights, after the events of 1968, after the rivers of blood speech when there begins to be an active black politics in Britain. It's very active in Birmingham where I'm living, you know. All the work, community activism around race that leads into Policing The Crisis. The impact of Bob Marley and of reggae and of Rastafarianism on second generation black youth. If you take all of that, well that is now the culture of Britain, partly the culture of Britain and so what I'd learned about Caribbean culture I begin to think of what is going to emerge as black British culture or black Asian culture thought along the same lines as I'd been forced to think about Caribbean culture. It's going to be not exactly what it was in the Caribbean, the longer it goes the more it's going to change. It's going to take on a lot of British things, it's going to adapt to the terrain but it isn't going to adapt to the terrain short of resistance. So if the British don't allow it to establish resistance that will indeed strengthen the look-back rather than the look-forward. The dynamics of cultural change are underneath multicultural society, they're underneath anti-racism, they're underneath the future of multi-ethnic Britain. You know that is the multicultural question – this is the multicultural question. Essentially how are cultures, metropolitan cultures, that have been imperial but have lived at 400 miles separation from their imperial conquests, now to live with the fact of colonization in the post-colonial world on their doorstep? What sort of societies can emerge from that and that is so dynamically a cultural question? The lacerating experience on the second generation who had never seen the Caribbean who had a very alienating experience in the schools, subject to discrimination, subject to racism, subject to police oppression – they reached for a conception of themselves as a new kind of African people. In what sense are they? They've been to Africa. They only know Africa through Rastafarianism which knows Africa via the Garveyite movement. The transposition, the translations of Africa that create an African sensibility in Handsworth amongst a 17 year old in the 1970s is extraordinary. Just think of the number of shifts that have gone on to produce that. But you can track it back along its route. So I began to think of culture as the routes, R-O-U-T-E-S, by which people have come to their present situation and we've all come by different routes. But not just as roots, R-O-O-T-S, not just as something always buried in the same sand or living off the same cultural resources or embedded in the same society. So as I get closer to all that, these earlier ideas about Caribbean society begin to feed in to thinking about black British society and multicultural society as a kind of diasporic experience.

## **MARRIAGE AND FEMINISM**

**MJ:** How did you meet your wife, Catherine?

**SH:** I met her on an Aldermarston march but that's not the whole story. Her sister, Margaret, is married to Mike Weston. And Mike Weston has been associated with the early New Left from very early on. He was an airman who walked into a meeting at 100 Oxford St. on NATO in his blue RAF uniform off his motorbike with a huge helmet. And he came through the door talking, he talks very fast indeed, talking with droplets of water falling off him and everybody thought – he's a CIA plant. No man in uniform would come into

this meeting. So he then went to Oxford because he did his military service first, he associated himself with the New Left just immediately after I left. They started a New Left student journal. So he's been involved with the New Left ever since. And he met Margaret at Oxford and through going out with them I met Catherine but actually it was on an Aldermarston march and we left the march and went on holiday in Wales. So that's how we first teamed up. She was, I'm embarrassed to say, still at school, had just taken A-levels and was going to Sussex the following year.

**MJ:** You got married and went to Birmingham almost immediately...

**SH:** Well, we went in opposite directions first. I went to Birmingham and she went to Sussex. I still had my flat in London and we used to meet. So I used to leave Birmingham as soon as I could in the week as early as Thursday evening. She would try to leave on Friday morning and we would meet in London. And eventually we said we can't go on with this travelling from the opposite ends of the Earth – we might as well get married. So we got married in December 1964 on my mother's birthday and she then transferred from Sussex to Birmingham so she finished her undergraduate work in Birmingham, which was very good because she was really involved in history from very early on and it was a very good history school and she was taught by and then supervised by Rodney Hilton, who was a Marxist historian of the Middle Ages, so it was very important, that transfer. So we set up home in Birmingham, in fact.

**MJ:** But you must've found yourself in 1964 during the Smethwick by-election looking for somewhere to live.

**SH:** Yeah we were precisely looking for somewhere to live in 1964 and the Smethwick by-election, which was I think I said earlier, sort of brought the race question directly into politics. An official candidate of one of the major political parties had never before stood on an explicitly racial ticket and defeated the Labor candidate. It was a big moment. Now, we were looking for places to stay. And I have to say that I then encountered racism in a way in which I don't think I had really encountered it before. You see, I hadn't lived in London for very long, I had lived in Oxford. I had gone down to London a lot and gradually throughout the 50s I became aware that racism was an active presence on the streets. Then, in 1958 we got involved in Notting Hill but I had never experienced it personally, you know, very directly. But in '64, in Birmingham, in the West Midlands, racism was absolutely overt. It was the first time things were called out to us in the streets because we were a mixed couple. We didn't have a very easy time finding a place to live although we eventually did quite close to the university. It was really a pretty traumatic experience. I had never really talked to her about what it was like for her. She was 19 or 20, not very old. I never quite understood how she made, you know... coming from a Yorkshire, Baptist, dissenting, liberal background. Their household in Yorkshire always had black students, African students, her mother was involved in the United Nations work, her father's a wonderful, very benevolent, very liberal man. But she had never really met any black people before so how she really took the decision and whether she understood what the decision was, in Britain, in the early 60s, to marry somebody older than herself

who was black and where we were going to live, we never talked about that. But it was a shock to see ourselves suddenly externalized as the black and white couple.

**MJ:** What happened when you went to the Caribbean with her? Was there a kind of mirroring in some way or in a different way?

**SH:** That was difficult in the opposite direction because first of all she encountered my parents and my family. She had never seen anything like it before and I well remember the encounter between herself and my mother around the dining table when my mother started to talk about the servants in their presence and this 19 year old stood up and said, "you can't possibly talk about people like that. They're human beings standing right behind you!" and of course stormed out in a flood of tears. And words like that had never been uttered in my household before, absolutely never spoken. It was the breaking of the taboo. This young English wife had come back to. So that was difficult, that encounter. And at the same time, that was the moment of the most intense anti-white feeling in Jamaica. There isn't anti-white feeling now, you know, the problems in Jamaica are internalized between the brown political elite and the black masses – it's gone somewhere else. White people are from the outside, really. They're tourists or they're business people who come down, etc. There are more of them on some islands than some others but anti-white feeling was at its highest in the 60s. And she found that extremely difficult. She had made this commitment to marrying me. She had made the commitment to identifying herself and they could not accept her there – not only that – they weren't interested, they were so pre-occupied with the founding of the nation-state that they weren't interested, they didn't have time to absorb who this other person was, what her interests were, etc. There's something ironic about this because of course she has gone on writing about the Caribbean, she's been to more Baptist churches in Jamaica than most Jamaicans know exist and many more than I've ever seen, etc. So it's an irony that she eventually went on to write about and from a Jamaican perspective of Jamaican experience. But in the 60s the effect of that was to consolidate my feeling that we couldn't go home. Not that I was very intensely wanting to go home but I thought if it's impossible, I can't bring her home when it's ambivalent for me in any case I'm not sure I want to do that and there's no space or place for her. So that sort of sealed the question for good.

**MJ:** And are there ways that her work has fed into your own thinking?

**SH:** Well, first of all, she's a feminist historian. She was involved in the feminist movement very early on. Birmingham had the first feminist nursery, run by the parents in a wooden shack in a public park. And the people of that generation whom she was closest to were exactly like she was – academic wives, wives of academics, wives of students or even the wives of people who worked but all of them with young children. All of them suddenly cut off from their intellectual life, from a public life, from a social life. All of them confined at home with children under 2, or two children – one under one and one under three – trying to bring them up in isolation. So it was a feminism from the base upwards. But she then became very involved in early feminism and in feminist socialism and so on.

Now, that relates to my work because feminism was one of the biggest, most explosive impacts on cultural studies. Which previously, in the early stages had been concerned with class questions, therefore concerned with male questions, and never really concerned very much with the feminine, with the domestic, with women's experience, etc. We did a bit of work on women's magazines, which brought in the feminine question, but we didn't centrally place the experience of women as of equal validity. So, I'm exposed to this on both fronts, I'm encountering it among the women in the center who want to caucus alone, separate from everybody else, they want to introduce feminist texts into the core texts of the MA, they want to change the culture of the center which was very much a boy's club. I'm encountering it at home because we are renegotiating our marriage, it's a question of, "Will you shut up now? Can you keep quiet for the next six months, please? Don't tell me about the New Left, and Edward Thompson, and Raymond Williams. Let me tell you about Mary Wollstonecraft, let me tell you about some other things, let me tell you about seeing marriage as a form of slavery, etc." It was an extremely tense struggle, I don't want to pretend it was easy, of course I got involved in it and of course I was from the beginning identified with it, active in it. I went to the first feminist conference at Ruskin College and was in the creche with other friends looking after the children, so I was very involved in it. But what feminism taught me was the difference between a conviction in the head and a change in practice, a change in how you live. I was a pro-feminist man, but I was a man unmade by feminism. I had not been remade by feminism. I didn't know how not to be. I was the older, senior figure who knew everything. So it was a very, very difficult moment, both intellectually, both in the Center and domestically at home. And our marriage had been made on the image... I remember writing love letters, which are really Lawrentian, they're like D.H. Lawrence, they're like *Women in Love*, and they are, "I am the sun to you, you are the moon to my sun," they see it as if I'm going to do the things, remake the world, and you are the perfect understander, etc. You can imagine what this young girl of 19 thought about that, she thought, "Oh, I suppose that's what marriage is about, better settle for it." But then came this other version and it was very difficult to change, very difficult to change, really to change one's lived practice, actually to take responsibility for the fact that she was not coming home, I was going to pick up the children, I was going to feed them, I was going to change their nappies, I was going to put them to bed, if I couldn't put them to bed they would sit awake until she came home because she was somewhere else talking about theories and important questions. So, it's one of the many times we have renegotiated the terms in which we lived together and is also true of the Center. A Center with it's sort of Althusserian Marxism, was a very masculine place, the boys ran the theory seminar, women weren't really supposed to understand theory very much, they didn't want to read Juliet Mitchell, they didn't want read Cissou, they didn't want to read French feminism, that wasn't what they were there for, they were there to continue the class struggle in culture. So it was quite explosive in the Center in every way, and of course it transformed my understanding, even conceptually, it transformed my theoretical understanding of Marxism. Because Marxism used to be about production relations, was never about reproduction, was never about the family as the site of social and cultural reproduction, the training, the insertion of children into a culture. Nothing about that, I mean, there are ideas in Marx which you can adapt and which a lot of Marxist feminists then did adapt to understand the feminist situation, and similarly questions about whether women should be paid for housework,

or whether housework was another form of work, all these questions that had never been asked, you know, around the core of an economistic Marxism. So it obviously changed that, it changed one's notion of culture because culture had been thought again in terms of the heroic makers of culture, which is a masculine, patriarchal task. Whereas the main transmitters of culture were obviously women. The most intimate relations to the forming human subject. What could be closer to the education and the drawing out of culture in the young child than the child-mother relationship? So, it's one of the – the world will never be the same again. So those were, that is one point at which the domestic and the public and the intellectual and the familial collided, and of course feminists nailed it, the personal is political.

**MJ:** But was the feminist drive for change at Birmingham, was that one of the reasons you left the Center and went to the Open University?

**SH:** Yes, it was one of the reasons I left, but it wasn't, by any means, the only reason. I think I've written something about it. I've written, trying to say how important the feminist intervention was, and I've sometimes used rather graphic images...eg dawn raids...I mean I wanted to recreate a real sense of displacement, it was a major displacement and I wanted to remind people that the man didn't then say, because they were all lefties, "Yes, do come in and tell us about feminism." They resisted just like good old patriarchal men of the left did. So, I use those strong metaphors because it was a rupture, it was a break, the culture of the place was transformed after that. When women said, "We're caucusing, we'll come to a general meeting after we've decided what we think." My god, perhaps the men should go into somewhere, they've never gotten together and decided what they thought, they just sort of spouted their ideas, etc. thinking everybody else would listen to them. So it was a major break. Now I, what I found difficult was being the director of the Center, a new field which inevitably the two or three members of staff had a huge hand in shaping. This field, we were the patriarchal figures. And I was in favor of the feminization of cultural studies in so far as I could bear it because I too had things I was holding on to. Cultural studies, we used to write together, can you imagine being in a room in which you've written a beautiful, elegant paragraph of Gramscian analysis and somebody says, "But there are no women in this paragraph, I'm sorry Stuart, but you know that doesn't talk about talk about women's experience. That isn't exactly like the factory experience." 'Well, would you like to draft a few sentences into my paragraph!'

So, I think this is the real experience men have with feminism. I think they don't own up to it. It sort of is as if the slave owner suddenly decides slavery is a bad thing and I'm going to be on the side of the slaves. Its not so easy to cross the line because you're in a position of power which isn't a personal position—I couldn't say well you become the director of the center. I was part of the university hierarchy, I was the director. And I thought it placed me in a false position. I could neither be with them nor did I want to be against them. And I thought it was not a tenable position to be in. So it was one of the reasons I moved on—but in that way. It's not as if I ran away from feminism or didn't want it to happen—quite the opposite.

## POLICING THE CRISIS AND THATCHERISM

**MJ:** I wanted to go back a little bit to you talking about Smethwick and the bubbling up of race into politics. What was behind Policing the Crisis? And what was its reception?

**SH:** Well what was behind Policing the Crisis was the fact that some people in the center were involved in community action in Birmingham. This is the great period of community action and working at the grassroots level etc. And they were running community centers in Handsworth, which is an area of consolidated Black migration. And they were encountering the problems of the second generation youth who had run away from their families, getting involved in drugs, getting involved in with arrests with the police, harassment with the police, etc. Suddenly there was an event in which three boys: one Afro-Caribbean, one Turkish, one part Irish robbed an old man coming out of a pub late at night—beat him up rather badly and I think they took sixpence, a shilling, you know they got nothing and a bunch of keys—they got nothing.

This was seen as a willful act read in the context of runaway youth of the youth rebellion and violence read in terms of race and the Blacks etc. And it comes after Smethwick after the build up to the power of speech, rivers of blood speech where the inner city is becoming the microcosm of urban chaos. The image that people have of...and people at the center then got involved in the legal defense of these three boys. But what was interesting and important was the way in which the case was taken up as an example of what the future would be; very much read in terms of American race relations. So Handsworth today, Harlem tomorrow; Harlem yesterday Handsworth today; mugging comes to Britain from the US.

So the image of race relations in the United States, which of course was at a high pitch at that point, is played back to Britain. And it becomes a very politicized question. And the boys get a very heavy sentence – obviously a sentence that is meant to carry a political message. So we begin to research this case: how many muggings are there? What does mugging mean? Is there a crime called mugging? There wasn't a crime called mugging. Mugging was a conflated statistic of various kinds of robbing in the streets. Who composes these categories? It was the police and police statistics we knew because we were involved in studying crime and deviance as one of the forms of subcultures we were looking at. We knew that this was what is called a dark figure of crime. For every crime that's actually recorded or part of a statistic there were two other incidents, which could or could not be recorded in the same way.

So how is it being classified? Is it being caught up in a kind of political law and order mood that's overtaking the country? So we began to look at—we began to set the case in each of its wider contexts: in the context of urban crime, in the context of race, in the context of the youth generation, in the context of law, in the context of police, in the context of criminal statistics, in the context of what was being said in Parliament. I mean there were lots of politicians at this point who whenever there was an incident like this used the metaphor of the tip of the iceberg. Everything was the tip of the iceberg, the students in Cambridge were the tip of the iceberg and Handsworth was the tip of the

iceberg. And what they meant was really there is a kind of crisis of legitimacy, a crisis of governance growing in the society, which requires a strong law and order response from the state, from the law, and from the police. And what you see is a massive urban crime and kids running wild in the streets etc. The society talked itself into what I called a law and order crisis. And that law and order crisis was the breeding ground of Thatcherism. That is what Thatcherism came out of.

So we found ourselves beginning to write a book about a crime that three boys had committed in Handsworth and ended up writing a book about the emergence of Thatcherism. The book took nearly ten years, eight years to research and write. We wrote it collectively, each wrote different chapters, I wrote a lot of it through at the end but we each contributed. So it's a much slower process and gradually the context of Policing the Crisis was expanding on us. In the end we were talking about the state, British society and the state and why race had become a kind of prism for all the other crises of the state. Why was it the kind of common language of what is wrong with society why Britain doesn't look like it did before, why we've gone wrong, why we've lost the peace, and why we're not so important anymore, why the empire—etc. A kind of general melancholia of the society requiring strong intervention; somebody must guard us/protect us against this "other" that is living and running wild amidst.

So that was the book that we produced in policing the crisis. And I say two things about it. First of all it's been very influential. It sort of transformed a lot of chronological work; it became a textbook and still is a textbook in Criminology. So generations of Criminology students including policemen I have met police officers who said I was taught Policing the Crisis. So it's had a massive impact over the years in terms of foregrounding race as part of the wider political context. But its had another consequence and that is that what it said---we did a lot of work reading letters that people wrote to the press about the case---and what we said is there is this law and order mood developing, what I later called authoritarian populism. It's a populist mood wanting to be saved from itself by the leaders of the society. It's not quite fascism but it has the same structure as fascism does. The resolution of an underclass in identification with those above – let the law save us from the Blacks to put it crudely. Well one of the things that this showed me was what would happen if you tried to base a politics in this mood; if you tried to capture this mood and express it politically.

So although Policing the Crisis was finished in 1978 and Margaret Thatcher didn't win the election until '79, I bet that Mrs. Thatcher would win the election because I said if Policing the Crisis is right—I don't know of many Sociology books that are good at prophesying the future but this one unfortunately was. So I could see the whole of Thatcherism in the '80's unwinding out of the unresolved crisis of social democracy and of race and urban deprivation in the 70's.

**MJ:** You've also said that the problem of Englishness, of what it means to be English has been a central problem of the last 20 years. Did you see that working itself through Thatcherism and through the Falkland's and everything else?

**SH:** Yes I did. I suppose I saw that as early as Oxford that there was a kind of assumption of the natural superiority of the English. And that was a superiority interestingly over the over the crass, vulgar Americans and the over emotional Italians. It wasn't just in relations to Blacks, the British thought that they were the greatest people in the world, and that is an assumption. It's not a conscious attitude. It was at that time a kind of implicit assumption, an engagement with the world. Well I think that what happened in the 70's was an awareness that the roots of that sort of unspoken assumed cultural identity was threatened. Threatened all around, threatened globally by growing American power, threatened by the development of Europe, of which the British didn't then and don't now feel any natural, cultural, organic connection. They are willing to have a market with them but they don't feel themselves as part of the European traditions of thought and ideas etc. Being threatened by the growth of localism and devolution, the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish—threatened by the Northern Ireland situation. It suddenly began to feel not like an old expansive imperial culture that stretched from the Himalayas to Northern Canada, it began to feel like a tight little island. Defensive. And then guess what happened? The Blacks started to stream in and occupy this tight little island. It's not a surprise that people felt we are English what are they doing here what is this other? Why do I have to learn what Urdu is? Why do I have to look at people in a sari. Why should I have smells of curry at times when I don't want it? Why should their transistor sets be so big? Why do they always drive BMWs? Everything in everyday life said these are outsiders, they don't belong to our way of life, they have not been formed by the Puritan tradition, they don't have any emotional reserve, they express their emotions in their bodies and in their music, they dance in an openly physical way, they make jokes and rib one another. They're too loud, they're too aggressive, they break the sound barrier. You could just see – its not a defense of racism but I'm trying to say why racism which works on this logic. I am in a bad way and who is responsible? They are responsible because they are different from me and they just came. That's why you hate Jews because you struggled to get a house and goodness me the Jews have just moved into it and the value of my property has gone down. You feel besieged by them.

In addition to that there was a kind of crisis of cultural identity. You couldn't any longer be English in the old way because you didn't rule the world any longer. You lived in that imperial past, that is what fed your being and you couldn't conceive of a future in which the English could be proud of themselves and yet accept that they had to share the world with lots of other people who weren't like them. They had to share their own country. They had to share the sidewalk. I think that cultural dimension to British racism was then fed by Thatcherism which had a very particular English revival of imperialism, a Victorian conception of Englishness which is expressed in the Falklands war. This is utterly anachronistic. Send the gunboats to straighten out the Argies. I mean we haven't heard that language since the 1890's. It's a very backwards-looking conception but it rallied feelings and sentiments. When working class people marched for Enoch Powell, that is what they were marching for; a way of life going out of existence. They were mourning the departure of a way of life.

**MJ:** In terms of Thatcherism what would you say to people who said that you over estimated the ideological thrust of it?

**SH:** I don't have a single minute for that criticism not a second. I was more touched by it at the time because of course that was what I was interested in, that was what I was good at I never said Thatcherism doesn't have economic consequences. I just said don't forget that it is operating on all these other levels. I was very inspired by Gramsci's notion of power and hegemony. His notion of power and his notion of hegemony is that you don't constitute power simply by being in the place of the state, by governing the society. You also constitute it by leading the arguments on television, by winning the philosophical battles, by having new political ideas, by being able to transform institutions to your model of society. Power is dispersed along all these sites, and that's a different power from domination. Domination, you impose it, you send the troops into the city, you hold them down. That lasts for 10 months. After that people begin to organize and rebel. But the power which wins consent and builds peoples fears, fantasies, phobias into a model of society is a different basis of power. I thought that was really what was going on and that is what I was trying to say about Thatcherism.

Now, if I look at New Labour all that I can see is the way in which that ideological revolution succeeded. It had succeeded in establishing the ground on which New Labour took power in 1997 and, because they had no other thing to put in its place, they have then gone on in their own particular way to reproduce that structure of ideas. They have become a neo-liberal social democratic party. That is a contradiction in terms but that is the level at which the Thatcher ideological revolution won. So I don't have any apologies at all for drawing the attention of political commentators who of course were more concerned with who's going to win the next election. Is Mrs. Thatcher revising her cabinet? The minutiae of the Westminster village that's what they think politics is; politics is much broader than that, and I think the revolution that brought neo-liberalism as a managerial technique into restructuring public lives, the universities, local democracy, the public services, the health services This transformation which is called by New Labor modernization or reform. It is really the privatization of the public. It's the destruction of the public and the raising of the private solution to the public troubles to the level of a governing ideology. That is what Thatcherism is about.

OK, New Labor doesn't have... it's not about to recapture the Falklands, but it does have a kind of Thatcherite drive to be a subordinate part in the governing party of the rest of the world. So even that has not been lost. New Labor adds other things, adds social democratic touches. From this perspective, after the failure of New Labor to come in and confront new historical situations, but on the basis of a transformed ideological position, winning the culture to a different kind of politics—the failure to do this justifies the attention that we paid in the early stages to the Thatcherite remodeling of the culture into a culture of market fundamentalism.

## **NEO-LIBERALISM, GLOBALIZATION & THE ECONOMIC RECESSION**

**MJ:** What's your view of the global economic recession that we're in the midst of? Also, what led to it politically and economically?

**SH:** Well, I think it's a sort of moment of insanity, really. Because when I think about what the economic model was that they'd been running with really ever since the end of the Seventies, ordinary people couldn't possibly run their own finances in this way. Who believes that things only grow and nothing – you know I remember there used to be a line at the bottom of letters which a savings company said to you, "what goes up, can't come down!" It's sort of backing themselves against a normal economic cycle. So the notion that we've overcome the economic cycle, that boom and bust has been abolished, that we're in a new economics, which is a win-win, people can't lose and everybody wins. The actual practices that have gone on part and parcel of the financialization of the economy, which is really there's no manufacturing going on in Britain any longer. It is the biggest industry here – making money. And it makes money out of making money out of making money to the third and fourth level. And when, which it does, includes ways would you think of parceling together good and bad debts? And that there'd be somebody in the world that would buy them off you and some other person would buy them off them. I mean its craziness.

One of the questions for me really is how did we get into this? How did we persuade ourselves that this model could possibly work? So I think that takes us back to the moment when it begins and what moment of neoliberalism, what moment of Thatcherism, really? That is the revolution, which Thatcherism introduced, the revolution of market forces, let markets rip, market is the only way of deciding what the value of anything is. This is the revolution, this was the revolution and we've been inside that, the bubble, of that revolution until now, really.

**MJ:** Well Gordon Brown's line would be that this is a global recession and not only a British one.

**SH:** Well, I believe it is but the way in which Gordon Brown puts that is one of the mantras that he's been repeating ever since the crisis started, which drives me completely insane. It is true that it is global now what people mean by that is that well there has to be global agreement about what to do with this and this is an ideal of globalization which is completely false. Globalization doesn't mean that. Globalization has produced the deepest inequalities we've ever seen – between rich and poor nations or within nations between the rich and the poor – so we're only 'all' in the same sense in the sense in which we're all connected into it. So there's finally something which connects poor farmers in China or West Africa and people in the favelas in Latin America and people in Beijing or Bangladesh, with the super rich. They are all part of one system. Part of one system is living in Manhattan, having vacations in Majorca, and the others are manufacturing in a one-dollar a day economy miles away.

That is what globalization has done and one of the negative effects of that then is that any infection spreads like wildfire. And in this sense Gordon Brown is right. Anyway, it does sort of depend if demand doesn't pick up among poor people there is nowhere for the manufacturers of Germany and France to go. So we're locked into a global system and that's a new element, and that also came in in the Seventies, but it isn't quite what he

means, which is that we must all pull together, find a common consensus. I don't think anybody is going to go that way to be absolutely honest. We are bound to have each country looking for a way of stabilizing its own economy before it agrees to put vast sums of money into saving the world.

**MJ:** And do you also see this as coming out of a kind of cultural shift or a new ethos not simply through economic policy or through different ethics or a different way of individual...

**SH:** Yes, I do. I mean I think we talk neoliberalism, actually when I say we talk about it, it's noticeable that no newspaper, no serious broadcasting institution ever knew about the word neoliberalism until it started to collapse. But we've been in a period of neoliberalism and that is an economic model, which we've talked about, but it's also a social and cultural one. It is what led to the notion that only the public is inefficient, only the private can be efficient. Everyone should be an entrepreneur, you should teach children at school entrepreneurial values. There's nothing else to teach them. As Mrs. Thatcher said, "there's no such thing as society, there are only individuals and their interests." There is no way of calculating a common interest or a collective notion. Well this is dismantling a whole series, it's dismantling an ethical and political world, it is really breaking up the old Keynesian welfare state, social democratic settlement that we had since the war.

So it's a huge transformation. I mean, the notion that you can pay your mortgage by putting it on your credit card, you know that comes out of a fantasy that there's endless amounts for everybody. We can all maximize our needs tomorrow, we don't need wait, to save for it, to calculate risk, we just can have it. Everyone can have it. So there's a kind of mass hedonism that has supported this from the very beginning. And I think you see it not only in, of course, the bringing of the business world into every other sector, must our business run in the university, or in the arts, or running the schools, etc? They don't know anything about these worlds but that's because only business and markets somehow can be validated and that's part of the craziness but it's also been on the other side.

I think that celebrity world is what I would call the kind of mimicry of the super rich. Ordinary folk can't be super rich in that way but you can have a kind of a moment, you know a kind of tawdry, vulgar, second or third-rate version of it and the degree to which most people live their sort of economic ambitions and interests through this fantasy of it rather than through the reality of it, they would know that people were living a life which they can no conception about. The super rich are in a universe of their own but they have no contact with that. All they have contact with is people who wear bling because everybody can wear expensive jewelry and so on. So I think that the idea that this is only an economic phenomenon is quite untrue and one of the things that strikes me about what people are saying about it is that nobody is really pinning these connections between the economic model, the political forms of neoliberalism, the culture of consumer society.

## THE OBAMA PHENOMENON

**MJ:** And what do you think of the prospects for Barack Obama dealing with this, how do you think he'll...?

**SH:** Well I think it's too soon to say whether he's going to be successful or not. But I think one of the tragic ironies is that, you know, he came in with a really interesting, large-scale, very different conception of how things could be and he finds himself plunged into the middle of the deepest economic crisis, which is obviously absorbing all his energies and the energies of his team and so on. So it is a tragedy that he's been struck by this within weeks of coming into power.

Nevertheless I don't think that sums up what I feel about the Obama phenomena. I want to divide the Obama phenomena into two. The first is the huge historic shift which he represents – bringing a black person into the White House. What that means in terms of America's historic race relations. Also getting America to vote for change, even though it's not a very specific notion of what that change should be. Getting America to vote for a different kind of way of behaving overseas. These are huge transformations. And he should've been successfully putting that across and getting young people to invest in it. I think that's a huge historic achievement and I think that's already done. Even if he's completely unsuccessful after that – that's done and finished, wrapped up, and we'll reckon on the consequences of that historically.

And then what can he do now that he's in power? And I think we've expected too much of him. He's one individual, he's not a magician, he can't conjure things out of nowhere. The people on the left imagine that Obama is going to bring socialism back to America. He's never been a person of the Left of that kind he never pretended to be. He doesn't come out of that tradition. He comes out of a civil rights, black struggle, redistribution of America's enormous wealth, you have to measure him in those terms. If he were to bring some of the millions of people in American who have no health insurance at all, if that's all that he did by the end of his first term, I think that's an historic achievement.

So I think of Obama, you know, an individual trying to change a system as the strongest nation in the world, a massive global power, I imagined him in his first week meeting the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the Federal Reserve, these huge entrenched interests with enormous economic resources behind them, and Obama is trying to say, "I think we ought to go in a different direction... guys." It's a huge thing that he's trying to do.

I don't think that we ought to excuse him for that, I think that we ought to be critical. I think he's going to make a mess of the Israeli-Palestinian thing, I don't think he knows how difficult that one is. I think he's being very ambivalent about Afghanistan, trying to win and get out at one and the same time. You know there's all sorts of things like that that I think we will be disappointed by, partly because our expectations will be too high and not a realistic sense of what it's like to change a global world power, which is what he's trying to do.

**MJ:** And on a person level, many people thought they'd never see a black US president in their lifetime, were you among them? Were you very cautious before and what did you actually feel?

**SH:** Well I thought I'd never actually see it in my lifetime but that may not mean that it wouldn't happen quite quickly. If you think of Jesse Jackson, it was already quite a break. It was a serious candidacy by a Black American, of course he didn't get very far, but I thought against the background of civil rights and what had been going on around that and in its aftermath, in the period since. There will be some serious black people who will get quite far in politics. You think of Washington in Chicago, we think of the black mayors. It's been a longer running thing that's not to say that it's not a big achievement, huge achievement but it is a very important marker but it's not inconceivable. It is inconceivable in Britain, but it wasn't in the US.

So I wasn't surprised by that, what I think is important about it is, in one way, I've just been reading his book, the book about his father and I think of what was said at the time and he may have said it himself. I'm not just a black politician – meaning I'm not just appealing to the black constituency – and of course he comes from this very mixed background – African, lived in Hawaii, Indonesia, a Muslim name – and when I read the book I understand that though he's not, in the classic sense, a black African American, he spent all of his time trying to discover who he was. He went to Chicago to find out who he was. So he's a black politician because of what he symbolizes not because of the color of his skin or the history. It's because he's learnt to speak on behalf of a tradition to the rest of America and it's that moment of translation from the values of something which he's learned himself into a wider world which doesn't see itself as racially defined. Which is a moment that he symbolizes and I don't know that I thought that I would see that.

## QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

**MJ:** There's been a growing interest in identity in your work, could you explain a little bit about the development of your thought on this, from your earliest awareness in the Caribbean of different ways of being black, even if it wasn't mentioned.

**SH:** Well I think the question about identity has always concerned me in a certain way because although I identified as a Jamaican, I didn't really know what I was identifying with, it's not familiar about the life of ordinary people at all, of course I had been to the countryside etcetera, but I wasn't really internal to their life. So the question of identification has always been around, if you're not that, who are you? I sort of came to England with that in the back of my head, though I didn't start to work with identity at all at that stage. Then in the early stages of my postgraduate work, when I should have been working on Henry James, instead I was working on culture. That for me was a kind of search for identity. I wanted to know not just what I could feel I was, but much more, what is Jamaican culture really like, where does it come from? That posed the absurd question about that particular culture in that it comes from everywhere. Everyone in Jamaica comes from somewhere else. They come from Africa, they come from India, they

come from Europe, they're mainly English, and etcetera, but the indigenous people were wiped out within a hundred years of the Spanish coming there. So everybody was from somewhere else. I know what the English are; they are doing the same thing they've always done, that's what makes them English. I was exploring the idea of what I later came to call Diaspora, but I didn't know that was what it really was about. So that constituted a kind of intellectual search for questions of identity. Then we come to the engagement with Marxism, because Marxism thought identities were given, if you understood your socioeconomic position you would understand what your identity was. They weren't interested in the evolution of either the group identities, they thought class was the product of the way in which you were positioned economically and political, so they weren't very concerned about the process of identification. As soon as one runs into difficulties with that view, I ran into the difficulties from the very beginning, because I thought class is not like that, class is real, its effects are multiple. But it isn't like the script of yourself being written by objective social forces. That's not to say those aren't important, absolutely critical for identity, but then there is a process by which you take those things as they from you subjectively, and then how your position yourself in them as an actor. I thought that whole process is not in Marxism at all, it treats the subjects as social subjects given by their place in the economy. Well in a curious way, this was the way in which cultural identity generally was understood. You were Muslim because you lived in that society, tribal societies defined you as an individual person. I'm coming across the question of the inadequacy of the conception of class, and the other factors which are involved in your social class location, and the process, the more complicated process, of taking in the outside and producing yourself in the outside, which is more psycho-analytical, doesn't have to be psych-analytic, but its more attention to the psychic processes. Then the fourth influence is of course feminism. Feminism is one of the presences in my life, which is interrogating that view of class, interrogating that view of the givenness of your social life and political identity. Its asking the question, how is this subjectively produced, and recognizes that fact that there may be a dominant definition of how you are to be as a woman, but may not correspond at all to how subjectively you feel and if you try to make how subjectively you feel present in the world, you have a social class on your hand. And this social class is rather different than class politics, though its overrun by class of course, but class is not the only dimension which is giving rise to conflict, to contestation, etcetera. This is the moment of social movements, so its gender, its race, its class, its sexuality, all of these, a more multiple conception of how social identities are given. So I suppose its at the moment when this dissatisfaction with the conventional account hits me in many different ways, that I go back to the question of what is identity. I'm interested in identity more in what I call the process of identification, how do you come to identify yourself, rather than the fixed identities which you choose. Identity for me is always production, something has to be produced which gives you can position yourself in the world, a way in which you can positional yourself in historical narratives, a way you can position yourself in culture. So its rather different from the notion of identities which begin with birth, which are written into your genes, and which in a sense that you live out without being able to do anything about them for the rest of your life.

**MJ:** What part did your observation and participation of West Indian identity and how that was evolving in Britain, play in your thought, because you came to see that identity as part of a diaspora rather than simply displaced migrants?

**SH:** Yeah, well this is very, very important because if identities were given, in a more stable traditional sense and lived with you through the rest of your life, people talk about it as the inner seed, the thing that doesn't change. If identities were life that, I'd have to write myself out of that script, I wasn't that sort of person. The work that I did on Jamaican culture and on Caribbean culture, before and after slavery, and the relationship with Africa and so on, drew me to the question of Creolization. That is, if your identity is Creole, the one thing is it is certainly hybrid, it's a mix of different elements, different elements have coalesced to produce an identity or a position in the world. When I casted Jamaican and Caribbean people in the London setting, I said to myself well they come from a very mixed and hybrid kind of identity. They are the product of identities which changed historically. Well they are coming to live in Britain, this is the next phase, what sort of people are they going to produce themselves as in the new setting. Eventually I began to think of the common element as having to do with the diaspora, with people who have moved, who have migrated, taken into slavery, who have traveled from one place to another. That was the element which had blurred the traditional conception of identity when I thought about Jamaicans there, and it was the question I had to ask here. In a sense everything I have written about there ever since then has been to answer that question. What happened to them after the next migration?

**MJ:** Also the notion of difference has been central to thinking, what does it mean to you and how do you see its importance in how we think about these things about identity and so called multiculturalism, assimilation and so on?

**SH:** I have to begin somewhere else, just as I had to begin when you asked me about identity, and I need to say, this is a very particular history. These questions are around in different ways. I wouldn't say I follow the traditional path, that wouldn't be true. Marxism presented itself as a totalizing narrative. It could explain everything. That was in some senses its power; it gave you a grip, a frame, in which everything could be fitted. So the driving Marxist idea is totality, everything fits with everything else. Part of the way in which I lived the crisis of Marxism in the 60s and 70s was to question whether everything fitted in quite that way. I somehow lost the dream of totality. When I looked at the world, I thought maybe one day everything will fit with everything else. But just now, what I see in front of me is the historical legacy of differences. Whether they are gender differences, or racial differences, or class differences, or tribal differences, or religious differences, it is difference proliferating. Now you could go from there to a kind of celebration of difference, a kind of religion of difference, everything is different from everything else, the great dream of plurality. But I don't go that far, because I do see patterns and I do see persistent patterns, so everything is not quite different and therefore the principle of structuralism, which is similarity and difference always combined. Some similarities which are the persistence of traditions, and the differences. This mix, this matrix is how I begin to think about social and cultural questions, always similarity and difference. But, as against a position which looked towards totalities, I gave up the dream of totality. Now

you ask, what difference? I should say that, of course, another way in which this question posed itself to me was again in feminism, because feminism is built on what seems to be a given difference. Basic and fundamental, so fundamental that, say in Freud, it is the primary difference, and all other differences are sort of modeled on it. I didn't quite think that, but I accepted the centrality of difference in the analysis of social relationships. I thought men and women are not just the same, though men and women also share a great deal of common things as human beings. So it is always the question of where the difference plays into the similarities that the tensions arise. They are the things that change, in a way. To describe historical change is to describe the combination of similarity and difference. The Cuban revolution, the Russian Revolution, all declare a year one. Everything is going to start again, mankind is going to start again, and we're going to have socialist man. Five years later you look at it and you see what these societies have become is a bit of what they used to be and something new, they're on their way to something new. So even the claims of absolute innovation, total originality, don't work out historically like that. So I begin to give attention to the subtle play of difference, both in social relations and the way in which social relations are thought about and represented in visual or culture terms.

## DIFFERENCE & MULTICULTURALISM

**MJ:** In terms of these questions of multiculturalism, how do you see the tensions of sameness and difference working themselves out.

**SH:** I think in multiculturalism, of course we are now vividly concerned with questions of difference, because difference seems to be so accentuated in some areas that it leads to a kind of social apartheid, and that is the critique of multiculturalism which is now very strong, mainly I think in the wake of Iraq and Muslim fundamentalism. I know that the position I took in the beginning of the multicultural debates is under greater pressure now than it was earlier on. But I was never interested in what was called multiculturalism, which is really a government policy towards stimulating people to get on with one another. There are many varieties of that. In a way the United States is a multicultural society, they all remain somewhat separate, but you know, many people into one. Britain was a different case. I was not interested in multiculturalism. I was interested in what I call the multicultural question. I thought multiculturalism was about the multicultural question. This question is how do people with a different history, a different language, a different culture, different customs, different habits, different ways of holding the body, how do people who are born into a specific culture survive when they are obliged to share space with other cultures. Now the reason why. Of course I was thinking of that because of the question I replied to you earlier on, this is what had happened to Jamaica. The Africans were taken into slavery; they had to acculturate in some degree because they had to survive. Now they were coming to England, they are meeting the metropolitan country on home ground, and they were going to have to change again, so there is always adaptation and continuity. So I knew that multicultural groups would bring something with them, which would forever transform the situation into which they were

moving. So I knew long before the people acknowledged in the debate about “Britishness”, that “Britishness” could not survive untouched by the experience of the people coming in, unless there was mutual adaptation on both sides. This is where the question of racism arises, because if one is going to look down on the other, then there will never be sufficient equality for people to creatively adapt to change. So another reason why this question moved me was because of globalization. I suppose there was a time when the world was mainly composed of people who stayed where they were, over generations. But the world is not composed like that any longer and hasn’t been for a long time. The story has been much exaggerated. In fact, there have been movements of peoples, conquests of peoples, trading between peoples, travels of peoples from the very early stages. This idea that the Romans lived in one world is not true. But after imperialism, one culture attempted to shape another culture. And after contemporary globalization, after global capitalism, which is moving people around, either consciously because of their conscious choices, or more often because they want to escape civil war or famine or disease or poverty. So this multicultural question is going to arise everywhere, its going to arise in London, its going to arise again in New York, its going to arise in Paris, its certainly going to arise in Paris, because Paris has a very unitary conception of French citizenship, and the tighter that is, the more the challenge of difference subverts it. But the British also have a very settled conception, its never so well articulated as the French, it’s a very settled and selective conception of what Britishness is like, so also people living amongst them who are not going to go away. When I came to England, the first question I was asked was when are you going home? But then I saw the people in the 50s who weren’t going home at all. Many of them thought like me, that we were going home, but we weren’t going home at all, we were being disseminated. That is the diasporic process. We were being pushed on to somewhere else where you have to make a new life where the similarities and the differences have to be fought out without eating one another, without destroying one another. So I thought this is the coming question, the cultural question of a global world, how difference is going to survive, because difference in this sense is very persistent, people wont give up easily, some things that they bring with them because it defines who they are, it defines their identity. So there is no point asking Jamaicans or Barbadians to forget that there grandparents were slaves. If the British don’t want to hear about it, tough luck, but that is part of their identity and part of their difference of course, because they are living among the slaveholders. So that is not going to be an easy negotiation, they won’t give that up. But, they can’t stay like that, exactly in that position, just because that’s who they were. They are going to have to negotiate new space, either by struggle or by resistance or by creating work to produce new creative positions. That is what for me, multiculturalism is about, I was never concerned too much with the details of the policies which are different in different countries. But this is the problem that I think they were addressing.

**MJ:** And just as an illustration, do you think that the bi-centenary of the parliamentary abolition of the slave trade has illustrated some of those tensions or different ideas of identity?

**SH:** Oh yes, I think it is a very interesting development, in fact its much more raucous, riotous, and active than I thought it was going to be. I thought Britain was going to sleep

through the anniversary, but that is not so. It is being fought out in local groups, being fought out in museums, being fought out in galleries, its being fought out in debate, no it's a very lively thing. I think its reminded us that those underlying tensions that don't go away have to be negotiated, they have to be acknowledged, have to be understood, they have to be lived with, if we are going to get past them. I have to say that the fantasy that somehow the British might pay reparations to the Jamaicans for having enslaved them for over 300 years, that can only arise in a neo-liberal society which believes that everything can be bought and sold. The legacy of slavery, on those people, and in those societies, is not buyable, its not tradable, it requires something else. It doesn't require X to say sorry either. They say sorry is the most difficult word; it's the easiest thing to say if it gets you off the hook. I don't want to get them off the hook. I think this is something they need to live with. For one reason, the identity of Britishness has been, though it depended so much on Britain's imperial rule, has been constructed as if they've had nothing to do with it. This is the amnesia about where the primacy of Britishness lies, it is one of the most striking things about the debate about Britishness. British history has been written as if the empire was a sort of odd thing happening over on the side. My wife's work has been precisely to try to bring those two issues together, and I think though they haven't met in any sense, the abolition has brought them into the same frame. So you got to look at the film on Wiberforce, you see a version of abolition which is entirely celebratory. It has been assimilated into British history as one of the wonderful things we did. Don't misunderstand me, I'm glad they abolished it, but they thought it was okay for 300 years. I don't understand a society that cannot find a way of living with that and saying yes, its not blame, its not guilt, guilt is useless as a public emotion, but understanding is the only basis for any negotiation. But then on the other side people produce it, I come from somewhere else, this is a different history and I had to fight for it, it wasn't given to me, I fought it through the whole history of slavery, and decolonization and independence struggles are the product of having gone through that in the first place. So these legacies are present today, the poverty of most Caribbean islands is a consequence of them having been one crop sources of wealth for somewhere else for 400 years. So we are just at the beginning.

**MJ:** And Africa too?

**SH:** Yes, Africa as well. Africa we completely reshaped by this force the Middle East. People in Britain don't have any idea that we only left Iraq in 1921. They think we have nothing to do with it. We might or might not have anything to do with the Palestine problem? We created it, we devised this religious state. The forgetfulness that needs to be repaired, that's what needs to be repaired. Not reparations, I don't know who they were planning to pay anyway, they could give me a few shekels if they'd like, but the idea that that is going to wipe it out and after this we're not going to go on talking about it, forget it.

What I'm going to say about racism is a complicated argument. Of course, most people think about racism as having to do with skin color. Of course, it has to do with skin color, but not for the reason that they think. They think it has to do with skin color and therefore, its effects are ineradicable, they are transmitted genetically. I mean race is something you are whatever you want to be, and it will always remain so, so you can't do

anything about it, you can't have social engineering about it, because what can you do? My view is that questions of color come really right at the other end. Because groups are discriminated against, they find reasons why that discrimination is illegitimate. Now some are probably not very socially effective, we don't have a tribe of a blue eyed and the brown eyed fighting one another. But skin color is such an obvious mark of difference, that it becomes the focus of discriminating practices. It becomes the focus of stereotyping. So that's one thing about it. If you follow that path, you think of differences of race as primarily genetic, biological, and natural. Whereas my argument is that race is really much more cultural and political. What I mean by that is that its something that emerges, its something that changes. There are many different racisms, even racisms based on skin color, are very different from one part of the world to another. So its not part of nature, it belongs to culture and politics. A group which is discriminated against has to carry the mark of difference which makes it right that they are different and lower and less intelligent, and less worthy, and less worthy of the rights which apply to the other group. I once wrote a piece which created some stir, called Is race nothing but a floating signifier? I didn't mean that race hasn't tangibly effected and distorted the lives of individuals, on and on and on, has shaped societies. Of course it has produced massive conflict. But there has always been another kind of racism. There's always been cultural racism, which sometimes included skin color, but had many other features, or facets associated with it: religion, custom, language, daily life, dress, and so on. These are the cultural differences, and people are as aware of cultural differences as they are aware of skin color. I should think its I the eighties that people started to talk about cultural racism, as well as biological racism. My view is that there has always been these two discourses about race, a biological one, which has principally to do with skin color, and a cultural one. These are not separate because you have always been able to read one against the other. So, if you have black skin, by definition you're not very intelligent; by definition you're overly emotional; by definition you're violent. All kind of cultural characteristics can be read into the biological factor if you have black skin. Similarly, if you are different because of cultural differences, its particularly useful to be different because of skin color. People don't feel what they feel about Asians or Muslims now, principally because of skin color, but skin color is a kind of subordinate element in another range of differences, which make for tension and subjugation, and stereotyping especially. So these two discourses kind of function together, one in the minor part role, and another in the principle role. So I think we need a much greater expansion of our understanding of what racism is about. We need to understand biological racism as particularly effective because you can ground it in something you can't do anything about. If its in the genes, if its in the melanin of the skin, you can't social engineer away that difference. So if you can get all the cultural differences to be ascribed to that difference, well then we're home and dry. We have to be different, we are ineradicably different, and people are ineradicably black both because of their color and because of their culture. But if the discourses are much more flexible than that, then they're always intertwined, then there's always an element of biological racism in the discourse of cultural difference.

## RACE, DIASPORA & ART

**MJ:** OK, I want to move to a different field really, which is to ask when and why you became interested in black and diaspora artists, which has been perhaps the later phase of your work?

**SH:** Yes very late. Well I have to tell you something that precedes that. I suppose that is happening in the nineties and has gone on into the present. It has to do with an earlier phase of my life which is the phase associated with cultural studies, because cultural studies in the Raymond Williams mode was very much a question of giving culture an equal standing in shaping social life alongside politics and economics; there were social relations, economic relations and culture relations. Culture was no longer thought of as a dependent category. I think what I would call the first phase of culture studies, as it develops in Birmingham, or one or two other places at that stage. That was very much what it was about- thinking things that had been thought of as economical, political, social in terms of the equal significance of culture. That shift really began somewhere around cultural studies, but quickly extended to other fields, so that other disciplines have been reshaped by that thought, you get cultural history, you get sociologists in a sense practically being overtaken by cultural studies. Art history has been overtaken in the sense that they now talk about a visual cultural studies. So there has been throughout the disciplines, what I would call a cultural turn. It's a common phrase now; there was the cultural turn. I think we anticipated the cultural turn, but we are very much part of it and I've just written a piece about Richard Hoggart, who as you know founded the center for cultural studies and whom I went to work with in 64, saying that he is part of the cultural turn though it is a work he would never use. Now part of the cultural turn was theoretical. The idea was that this couldn't be done in the old Leavisite way by appealing to this is so, is it not? This is not proof of anything. This is a way of conjuring up existing cultural prejudices. You had to conceptualize this shift because you were trying to reassemble the elements of cultural analysis, of social analysis. The cultural turn, then, became involved with all the theoretical discourse of that time- with Saussurian-linguistics, then with structuralism, then with semiotics in film and the visual image, then with post structuralism because if structuralism proved to be too tight, we nevertheless had learned from structuralism, we had learned to use language as one of the key models for how culture works. We are all, whether we liked it or not, post-structuralists. We were after the social movement, so we were in a sense post feminists. I don't mean that we were in... but we were thinking after the break that feminism represents. This question we may come to later on, but I don't want to say any more about it at this stage. But, the theoretical models that influenced us most at that time were mostly French, so Saussure, Roland Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, more recently, Deleuze, Guattari etc. They were mostly from France, and they were very highly conceptual. So alongside the cultural turn is the theoretical turn. If you look at the study of English literature, which was influenced by culture studies, it has much more been influenced by the theoretical debates. So cultural theory was unknown, no one would have known what it meant. In Oxford, when I studied literature, say I'm interested in the theoretical turn. But after, you could say, after Terry Eagleton, the teaching of literature has become very conceptual, very theoretical. Okay I don't argue whether it's a good thing or not. My view is that theory is inevitable.

You can't do without it. If you're not theorizing self-consciously, you're theorizing badly. I'm not interested in the production of theory itself; this is how I differ from some of the people involved in the cultural turn. They want you to produce better and better theories. Theory for me is always a tool, as Foucault said, it's a tool towards analyzing something else, something in the concrete world. So I was never a producer, I never described myself as a theorist; I'm too mundane and too embedded in the world to be a theorist. But nothing can happen in terms of analyzing the world that is not theoretical. Theory is in that sense inevitable. I think that by the end of the eighties and early nineties, I begin to lose confidence in the endless procession of new theories, which all regard themselves as final, they are going to explain everything, except that in five years down they're followed by yet another one. I remember someone saying to me in cultural studies who didn't live in London, which is a sort of hotbed of theoretical turn, he said to me I find these texts very difficult to read, do you think if I ducked I would miss Lacan because I find it too difficult. So he saw it that these theories were already above everybody's head, but you could miss a phase, you could just not bother to engage in it because Foucault would follow that and etcetera. But for my own work, I lost the conviction in this production of highly conceptualized theoretical reflection. I thought we'd learned tremendously from it and I've learned a great deal from it, because it's within the framework of that theory that questions of difference arose, that questions of language arose, that questions of the significance of culture arose. It's within that framework that much of my thinking about contingency and politics, the openness to the fact of difference, the different historical periods are going to be different. All of these were questions raised somewhere within the framework of the theoretical turn. Another thing that happened which also affected me, is that of course a certain kind of classical Marxism was ditched forever, it became a more multi-causal analytic language. So I'm not trying to deny that, that's formed me very profoundly, but by the nineties I became convinced that this had come to its productive end. I wanted to go on thinking and go on theorizing about the world, but I didn't think that the most useful way to do that was in what was called theory. I became interested, of course my multi-cultural interests also I wanted to continue, then I became interested in what I would call forms of conceptualization which are not theoretical. I became interested in the way in which in works of art you can see that enormously profound ideas and indeed concepts are at work, that art is a kind of thinking also, it's a way of feeling and a way of looking, but it's also a kind of thinking. But because of the dependence of art on the distillation, the concentration that has to take place if this is to yield a concrete object, a painting, a piece of sculpture, an installation, a film. Because of that, it can't remain within the conceptual, that can't be the principle dimension. So it was engagement with the concrete which has always been my approach. Theory enables you to understand the concrete instance. Until you apply the theory to the concrete world, whether it's the first world, the historical world, you aren't anywhere; you have stopped too short. So that took me into the arts, which I'd always been interested in, but I had no trained knowledge; I had never been taught proper art history. I suppose that one of the points of entry was that I had always been interested in the image, I've written about the image, photographic image, still image, television image. So I had been interested in the image, one of the concrete areas of my application of theoretical concepts. But it wasn't a conscious decision; it sort of crept up on me. Sometime in the eighties I was invited by David Bailey to launch Autograph, which was the association of black photographers.

David A. Bailey. I spoke at the first launch meeting. The chair of Autograph at that stage was a wonderful West African painter called, photographer called, Rotimi Fani-Kayode. People like Sunil Gupta were associated with it. This was the beginning of the struggle over representation and race, a struggle over visibility, a struggle to put the black body in the frame where it had never been, from which it had been excluded or marginalized. So that political struggles around the image with which I was deeply involved in the seventies. And in the eighties I began to understand that this had also generated a body of work, not just a general discourse of imagery in society which was significant ideologically, but this was work which might be significant aesthetically. So that took me into photography, and photography and the art world. It took me back to some of those artists who had come from the Caribbean and from Africa and from Asia to work in Britain, both before the first world war, before the second world war, before The Windrush, and after, immediately after. Some of whom I had known in the Caribbean societies at that time. Then shortly after that, there was a discussion in the arts council about some money that had been left to contribute to the black arts. Out of that came INIVA, the National Visual Arts Association, which I'm chair of, so I became chair of the two organizations. So whether I liked it or not I was more organizationally institutionally involved in the visual arts. I should say that it also coincided with my retirement. So I retired from The Open university, which I loved because I think if I had ever had a career aspiration, I wanted to be a teacher. I had always wanted to teach. I love the teaching relationship. One of the wonderful things about the center for cultural studies was the people I taught and supervised have become my friends and co-interlocutors. What a fantastic process, which is of course described as a process of educational delivery and educational customers, they were my customers. I have been very involved in teaching. But when I gave teaching up, I thought I don't want to go on trying to be a sort of academic intellectual without an academy, without any institutional frame. I had The Centre for Cultural Studies, I had The Open University; I wasn't going to be an academic intellectual up in my study upstairs. I wanted to be involved in the world, and this seemed a good way of continuing all the things I'd been interested in, in another sphere. It's what I called the knights move, from chess. You move ahead but not by going straight ahead, but from going sideways, and then that way. So I took all the baggage about Marxism and post-Marxism, the baggage about culture, and culture's relationship to society; I took all the baggage about multiculturalism and what was West-Indian culture, and the diasporic and delivered this whole baggage into the arts.

## **RACE & MODERNISM**

**MJ:** As part of your historical view of art, how have you looked at modernism, Frank Burling said that the black soul, if there is such a thing, belongs in modernism, do you agree with that and what kind of work do you think needs to be done on modernism?

**SH:** I don't believe that the heart of the black soul is in modernism. But I do believe, which I think a lot of people don't, that modernism belongs as much to black people as to white people because I see modernism as an enormously important historical shift. I think modernism is only related to a much wider thing which is the emergence of modernity

and this is a social, cultural, economic formation or which modernism is only one aspect. So I don't believe that black people should reject modernism because it has been captured and colonized as it were by Europe and then by America. I'm interested in the people who came in the fifties and sixties because they came to be modern artists. They thought, we are part of the modern world, we're going to throw off imperialism, we are going to create new societies. That's what modernism is about, so if they wanted to take part they saw it as an international creed, not as a form of Euro-centrism. It has since become a form of Euro-centrism, and in America I'm afraid, when modernism was finally taken up, it acquired an enormously triumphalist characteristic and feature. So I think there is a tremendous amount of work to dismantle the Eurocentric appropriation of modernism. But I don't think that it would be wrong for people to engage themselves with modernist tradition. And what I see not only in the work I have talked about with Caribbean artists, but all over the world one sees fantastic work in Latin America for instance, which is different from everything that we associate, not absolutely different, but sort of different from Picasso, Braque, but informed by them which is a kind of indigenous modernism. So how could one say well they shouldn't participate in this because it belongs to somebody else.

**MJ:** Well there was also the contribution to modernism.

**SH:** Yeah, well because of that they produce within this frame, and therefore the definition of modernism ought to be expanded to include this work. That is their contribution to what they saw as an international artistic movement. So our notion, I think, of modernism as an artistic phenomenon and our notion of modernity as a social phenomenon has to be enormously expanded. There are ways of being modern, ways of having modern aspirations, which will never simply look like America or Paris, but which is nevertheless representative of an aspiration to become a modern person. There are many modernities and there are many modernisms. So the work that I think ought to be done on this is to dismantle the way in which they have been appropriated and colonized and restricted and stereotyped so that we can have a much more global understanding on what modernism is about. After all modernism arises alongside the collapse of the nineteenth century representational art. It arises there for those media which are so good at reproducing the real world, photography, the image, later television, film etc, that art has to do something else. So you get abstraction. But you get abstraction, not only because of that, this is the world of Einstein, this is the world of quantum theory, this is the world where the narratives of modern science, the narratives of social development are all exploding on you, underneath the artist. This shift is taking place. Outside that, in the social world, this is the era of mass society, of mass culture, of mass industrial economic, that is to say this is the period of the rise of American hegemony. Well all of this is a world historical shift, its like the shift from agrarian market capitalism to industrial society. It's as big as that. It has never been identified as that. This is the beginning of the modern world. It doesn't make any sense to say that aspiring creative minds should absent themselves from it, its like saying I want to get out of history, excuse me I don't like history, could you excuse me from the next hundred years. What I have to add to this is a personal story. I'm the product of modernism. When I started to read for myself, and started to be interested in art as a young person, what excited me was modernism. Modern art was Braque and Picasso and Klee, Stravinsk, as if I was living in Paris or

London, which of course I was somewhere in my head of course living there, so it made perfect sense to involve myself in the most exciting new ideas around. When I came to England as a student in 1952, I went on a bicycle ride with an American friend in Europe, and I took only two books, the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*. At last I could actually hold in my hand James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the classical source from which it came, as if I could get all of Europe somehow if I could understand the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*. So these are profound personal moments for me, they represented my escape from a certain kind of colonial provincialism, from all the forms of colonial deformation that I have tried to describe to you before. They were my route out, my mental, fantasy route out. It wasn't that I wanted to be white, I never wanted to be white in the world. I wanted to get to where these things were registering what was happening culturally in the world. I wanted to get there. That's where I wanted to be. I was ignorant about the attempt to engage with modernism, for instance in the Harlem renaissance I didn't know people had tried to do this before. But I could hear in Miles Davis the combination of black suffering, urban sophistication, and formal experimentation. Terrific.

**MJ:** But then there was a later refusal of that, that you were talking about.

**SH:** Yeah there was a later refusal of that, but not by me. I have never been, I have been profoundly concerned with the importance of Africa to Caribbean societies, to Caribbean identities, to Caribbean culture, but I have never been an Africanist as it were. I have never been afro-centric, because if you ask about the centrality of Africa to Caribbean culture, you're asking about a translation. It is what Africa became under slavery in another part of the world. So already the transformations, the diasporic transformations have begun. Jamaican culture has many deep roots, deep and profound and unmitigated roots in the memories of African culture. They are all combined with other melodies and other rhythms and other realities, and other aspect of religion. I've written about this once or twice because next to where my grandmother lived in Old Harbour, this very small country town, there was a revivalist church. My grandmother always marched the entire family out to the Anglican church, for Sunday worship. My aunt who had converted to Catholicism marched, those who were left were marched to the Catholic Church. Then the Catholic pastor, and the Anglican priest came back for Sunday lunch. My father arrived from Kingston with all of us, you know, a huge country lunch. This is a tiny, tiny, poor house in Old Harbour, most dusty part of Jamaica, and with my wonderful grandmother who I adored, presiding over this. They would start to eat and drink; my father brought rum punch etc. While we were eating, across the road, the revivalist church began. First of all singing Moody and Sankey hymns. But gradually as the ceremonies over there progressed, the rhythm grew slower, it became more grounded, the bass began to come through and eventually it was a kind of African music. Well, what was I to do? Living in these plural worlds, in which Africa was still alive there, and Anglicanism, can you imagine Anglicanism? not just tradition, but Anglicanism and the Baptist Church down the road which has its roots in slavery and the Catholic Church which was a sort of minority affair up the road. This was the reality of Africa. This was what Africa had become in the new world. What has happened in the Diaspora is also what Africa has become. If you think of Rastafarianism, Rastafarianism is very profoundly African, but it arises from an African re-reading of the bible. So Africa is, you might say, everywhere, but you could never define

that culture in terms of the African element only. So I have always been interested in those mixed moulds and hybridity, in the diasporic, in Creolization; forms have always been that way. I think you see that in the engagement with the visual arts and with not identifying with that strand of the black arts in Britain, which took up an exaggeratedly Afro-centric position.

## A NEW POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

**MJ:** Stuart, in what you've referred to as a notorious essay that you wrote on new ethnicities, you wrote of a new politics of representation. What did you mean by that and how does that relate to the kind of artists that you've become interested in?

**SH:** That's a very good question. I need to start with the notion of new ethnicities. What is "new ethnicities"? Well, I think ethnicity used to be thought of like I described race earlier on. You're born with your ethnic identity, the society that you belong to gives you much of your personality, directs – it writes a script for your life and it's almost impossible to break from. Well I think just as one of the things I was trying to do was to open up and historicize and politicize the conception of race. I felt we had to open up and make more expansive and undercut the rigidity and the transcendental nature of ethnicity and how it was understood. I shouldn't just say that this question arises because in the 60's and 70's, anti-racist struggles were fought under the signifier "black" and "black" covered everybody, you know, it covered Pakistanis and it covered Indians as well as people who were traditionally black. When I chaired the Board of the Association of Black Photographers, it always included Asians in it. So this is not an exclusive definition, but at sometime in the 80's it became – the black landscape broke up into ethnic particularities. South Asian food and Indian dancing; everybody had to have an ethnicity. And what I thought was this was going to produce the same kind of locking down of identity as race had produced when we talked about "black". And I thought that this would be particularly attractive to the second generation since they didn't know – many people in the Caribbean were not from, what I would call, an ethnicity at all, and in any case, they didn't know what sort of – they were facing the question of, "What is your ethnicity?" So we were getting to a stage where ethnicity, while referred to as if it were a stable phenomenon, or Indian people do this sort of thing, was actually becoming something which people were changing and producing, they were – so new ethnicities were emerging. One of the material effects of that was, of course, this explosion in the visual arts; you could see a kind of interrogation of race and ethnicity going on in this work as people came to find that the black experience was not a unitary experience. Black in Africa below the Sahara, you're different from black in Africa above the Sahara, very different indeed, etc. The black experience was multi-form. So, I wrote this essay called "New Ethnicity" to describe, to account for the fact, that ethnicities do exist in our very powerful social and anthropological constructs, but actually ethnicity is lived differently in different places, in different confrontations, in different locations, in different historical moments. And so in that essay, and in one or two other in this period, it contains, why I called it contentious, it contains the phrase, "This is the end of the essential black identity. Not one

black, which we had been fighting under, but many blacks and that, I think, many people found very contentious.

**MJ:** Stuart, migration has become a kind of key issue in this era of globalization, conceived as oppression or crisis. How do you see it in this phase?

**SH:** I guess, I think, that globalization is sort of two-faced, you know? In the early days, to be active politically on the left was to be an international person. And in a way, globalization is the product of the fact that everybody is now in the same soup. It should be leading towards a welcoming of the diversity of human civilization, a greater solidarity between people who come from a different historical background, etc. Instead of that, obviously it's leading in some other direction. So there's some other thing at work within globalization, which has always been there, too. Remember, globalization begins with, I don't know, with the early European voyages at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They all attempt to take the culture of Europe out, etc. There is a kind of colonizing impulse - we have several phases of globalization. You know, one of the most important ones was the Cold War, when the struggle between capitalism and communism, or between Russia and the United States, was principally fought out on everybody else's territory; Vietnam, The Horn of Africa, you know, within Egypt, you know, right the way across the way in Guatemala. We had a third world war and it was fought out on third world terrain. So, globalization has always had this dimension of trying to imperialize and colonize, if not by directly occupying and governing another place, like we did in India or in the Caribbean, spheres of influence, much more Imperialism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Are you within the American or the Soviet sphere of influence? And I think current globalization is more like that. Some people, one or two people, are in favour of Imperialism in a sense, think that America isn't properly Imperialist because it doesn't want to govern places. You know, they're too attached to being in Manhattan, so they don't really want to go out on the frontier in the Himalayas and, you know, have tea at four o'clock in the afternoon and become sort of Indian in a certain European kind of way. They want to get home, back to New York. So, that is a new kind of sphere of influence, and the struggle of globalization now is for spheres of influence. And that means, also, within the market frame, you must be friendly to the west, adopting a western-style culture, and developing a market economy, and then you're on our side in the polarized world. Well, while that is going on, it is having tremendous impact on the indigenous civilizations, on the indigenous nation-states, only just emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the internal politics of the Third World, as it were. And the consequence of that is migration. Migration is the dark side of globalization, I would say. Because, you see, globalization - what globalization says - is that everything can move; manufacturers can move, images can move, culture can move, commodities can move. The one thing that mustn't move is labor. People must stay where they are. And you can understand why globalization thinks that, because you can't take advantage of cheap labor in Indonesia, if all the Indonesians are coming to the west coast. You have to have some poor people out there to continue to produce fridges, which you are going to consume, so that in the First World we can go over to the knowledge economy, you know. So, globalization of the capitalist economy into these two sectors, which crudely we talk of in terms of the South and the North, is one of the immense impacts of the new kind of

globalization. And the result of that is people, you know, thrown out of their indigenous homes, is the rise of the effects of old forms of difference, tribal differences, religious differences, that recur in the new setting and form the basis of different allegiances and lead to conflict. You have those people who manage to hear some of the messages coming from consumer societies in the west and think, "I want some of that. Why not me? I'd like to have some of that." And they are to be found on the bottom of airplanes, in the backs of trucks, you know, any form which can get them out of where they are to where the goodies are they will take. Then there are people who are peoples left out because they're extruded, exiled because of political conflict. You know, think of the number of Palestinians living not in Palestine, and this is seen throughout Africa. Think of the people of Rwanda who will never go back home, you know. And it's happening again in Darfur. So, this is the result of the imposition of a new kind of globalization on the populations themselves and the result of that is enforced exile, virtually, and forced migration. The world is full of people on the move because they simply can't get back to their homes. Livelihoods have been destroyed and they never will go back home in the foreseeable future. Then there are people who are exiled because of ordinary poverty, because of ill health, because of HIV/AIDS and because of the other pandemics, because of climate change, because of what's happening to the land, or the fact that they've been divorced from their only source of subsistence which is cattle or the land or a small home, you know. This is the shake up of the global world, the global economy. As a result of the drive of the west through globalization, if not to colonize then to dominate the south. This is the new world conflict, this one. And migration has become the kind of talisman of this process, where if you want to know where it's biting, look at where you have people who cannot go home. People, you know, trying to get papers illegally so that they can stay somewhere else; people trying to find ways of bringing their wives and children if they themselves have gotten away. You know, people making continuous efforts to get from North Africa to Spain, you know. Every time the boats are turned back some of them are arrested, they go back to the same places, they're on the move, you know. Don't romanticize it, you know, it is a horrendous experience by and large, and it's compounded by a feature of globalization which we don't often talk about, and that is the alliance between big capital in the west and that section of the people who inherited independence in the Third World whose interests are completely allied with them but who are, of course, natives. So, you know, think about the alliance between external and internal capital in West Africa, in the West African oil states. These people are not just being exploited by the west any longer; they are being exploited by their own politician, you know Fanon warned us that there would come a time when, instead of independence, they would liberate themselves, a small class of people, would be the inheritance of freedom and independence, and the rest of the people would be just the same as they always have been: left out of the economy, left out of politics, you know, with no real say in determining their future, their welfare. So migration has acquired this – wherever you see it, you know the modern form of globalization is biting, it's biting exactly there. Then you have to go into the situation to see why it takes the form it does. Sometimes it's religious grouping, sometimes it's tribal grouping, sometimes it's national grouping, sometimes it's just old inherited, you know, envy and vengeance working itself out. Doesn't matter quite what it is; it is the bite of this bifurcation of the world between the rich West and the rest.

## PERMANENT DISTURBANCE: A MIGRANT'S FATE

**MJ:** But do you still “ache”, as you once told me, for other lives you could have lived? Is that perhaps the migrant’s fate to conject?

**SH:** It is the migrant’s fate I think because I couldn’t go back and I could never be completely at home. So it is a kind of permanent disturbance. Now is there anyway where that could not be true? I don’t know in what sense it could not be true. But, I’m of course aware that there are always choices. There are always choices in personal histories, there are always choices in identifications and I could have seen myself living a different life. All, well not all, but 9/10th’s of the boys that I was at school with, who went abroad to study and went back to Jamaica, they became the politicians of the independence movement. They became the student uproar of the 1970’s. They created contemporary Jamaica. I used to go back a lot and all of them I knew. Occasionally I became involved in politics there but not really very seriously. It was no longer my home. I could easily have been such a person. I meet them now when I go back and I think, “I could have been you, you don’t know it but I could have been you.” But I’m not...but that’s another life I could have lived. I could have lived a life of identifying myself with the English academic institution. I never have. I’ve taught in academic institutions. I honor the intellectual life. I love teaching and have always loved teaching. I’ve been an intellectual, but I’ve never been an academic. So that’s another life. And lots of people now go abroad to the United States. There are masses of Jamaicans who teach in Jamaica and teach in the United States, live and work in the United States and go back four times a year. I don’t know what they are but I think they have the same problem I do or they will have the same problem. Somebody will say to them, “Oh you’re just like Black Americans” and that will drive them spare. So we’ve all, I was very moved when I was working on Henry James, I was interested in James because precisely I was interested in somebody who had two identities, who wasn’t a certain kind of American, who only found himself fulfilled in a certain kind of Europe but could never feel entirely a part of it. That’s why I worked on the international theme with James. And James has a story towards the end of his life where one member, I don’t remember if it was a member of the family, but one person stays at home, becomes a tremendously successful American entrepreneur, the other goes to Europe and lives the kind of artistic life that James lived etc., and the second one goes back and encounters in on a circular staircase keeps passing the person he would have become if had stayed. He keeps glimpsing him and then they pass and the next time he sees himself older, but yet it could have never have been him and yet it could possibly have been him, of course it could have been him. T.S. Eliot can write about that at the first winding of the stair, the second winding, the third winding etc. So I do think in some ways, “Why didn’t I stay?” I would have been much more comfortably Jamaican. I chose a path of unsettlement.

**MJ:** I just wanted to ask you, you’ve endured ill health recently and I wondered if you could identify what sort of effect that’s had on you and your work. I mean has it changed your outlook in any way? Have you become more focused and if so in what way?

**SH:** It ought to have made me more focused but I don't think it really has. I mean it has been a very powerful impact. One I can't travel very much and I thought of my retirement as a period where I could go to all those places in the world that I want to see. I can't do it and I'm not going to do it. Secondly, which is sort of a side point, it's made me passionately in favor of the National Health Service, which I talked about earlier on. I see how awful it is in some places, I swear at it now that I am on dialysis I am part of a really wonderful active community. And we chat about everything in life. I know all their family problems etc. We talk about the NHS and how it could be better etc., but the underlying principle of the NHS are the principles of the public interest, which cannot give way to market society. I've never lost that commitment. So being ill reminds me that I've been dependent on the NHS since I was first identified with the illness in 1982 and now I am dependent on dialysis, which I could never afford. Without the NHS I'd be dead, so there's that change. The third change is that it takes hours of my life. It's long to go for dialysis sessions etc., so I lose Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturdays out of my life. So that's a great limitation on reading, I can't read as much. There's a lot of limitation on writing so I really resent it for losing time and for losing the opportunity to travel. But I don't know that it has focused my life, I spent most of that time trying to build this cultural centre, The Centre for Cultural Diversity in the Arts in East London. So I shouldn't have taken on anything like that if I had been focused by my illness. I would have stayed at home, read Proust, and written. Instead of which I was learning how to brief architects, how to write a business plan, how to raise seven and a half million pounds, where to put the loos; you know its completely stupid involvement for somebody in their 70's.

**MJ:** But obviously a choice?

**SH:** Obviously a choice and a choice I'm not sad at having made although now it's too burdensome for me. I want in my last period, however little that is, to reflect a little bit more on the things you've been asking me about and, if I can, write about them. But I haven't really written about it except in rage about Blairism and New Labour. I haven't really written very much at all though I have gone on thinking about all these questions all the time. I think about them all the time.

**MJ:** Because you turned 75 recently and in terms of reflections I wondered if that had thrown anything up recently?

**SH:** Ever since I was identified with what they called end-term renal failure in 1982 I kept thinking, "What do they mean by end term and when is the end?" All they meant was that they will give out and you will probably eventually die from something to do with your kidneys. It didn't mean anything more than that. But once you are said to be experiencing end-term renal failure you do think about death. You think about dying and I resent dying like crazy. I have three more lives to live so I really resent dying. I'm not afraid of it because my interpretation of death is the loss of consciousness so I won't know I don't have it. I won't sit in heaven and think if only I'd been to China more recently. If only I could go to Istanbul. I won't know it; I'll lose consciousness. I'm not afraid of death I am afraid of the process of dying of course. And if you've been ill your likely to die serially rather than by one big blow. So I think about all of those things. I

think about them especially because Catherine whom I am married to is 13 years younger than me and when we got together she said, "Oh, age doesn't matter". But of course it matters she is not retired and I am. There will not be very long when we can both live an active life in retirement. So how can one not think about all of that you know I didn't have children until I was in my 30's? So of course I resent all of that. What I think about most is how many more days am I going to get after Rivington Place is open to finish writing a kind of autobiographical memoir. Will I ever write what I think cultural studies was? That was 40 years ago and people don't think of culture studies in the same way anymore. I thought of it in a very distinctive way and I thought it was related to the political in a very different way, which people now don't think about. I think I better put it down before all the people who ever thought that way are lost. So there are things I still want to write. And still want to be well enough to do. So my attitude towards death is, "Give me a breather, leave me a little space."

**MJ:** But you said you had children in your 30's and you now have grandchildren. How have you experienced them?

**SH:** I view that as sensational thing. You know first of all in the most obvious way you're not quite responsible for them in the same way. But you can be very close to them you love them to bits, you spoil them. All the things that I couldn't do with my own children in a way you can do with them. That's like being born again in a certain kind of personal way. I tremendously identify with both of them in their very different ways because they're very different people. I resent again that I will not see them grow. I fear for them because I think we will live in a tempestuous world in 20 years time. In terms of climate change and all the political conflict from climate change and lack of water, the lack of resources and the movement globally from one space to another. I don't know what they will be like or how they will live in that time. So its not entirely, you know, its not just super sweet. But I do love them quite crazy and I love the experience of being a grandfather.

[END]