

# ‘A DIFFERENT RHYTHM’: STUART HALL’S DU BOIS LECTURES

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Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, Kobena Mercer (ed), Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Foreword), Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2017.

When Stuart Hall began these lectures in April 1994 he described the creation of ‘the Du Bois Institute in the heart of Harvard’, the sponsor of his visit, as ‘an extremely important political intervention’.<sup>1</sup> Read in the context of this still relatively new institution, Hall could also have been referring to his own work, his deeply held conviction that all intellectual labour takes the form of a strategic intervention, a necessary contribution to a wider socio-political dialogue. From the outset, therefore, it is essential to bear in mind the unique history of the setting in which he had been invited to speak. Founded in the mid-1970s to honour and pursue the legacy of the great black historian and sociologist, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963),<sup>2</sup> the Institute grew out of the black American struggles for civil rights in the previous decade and, when a distinguished lecture series bearing Du Bois’s name was inaugurated in 1981 under the auspices of its first permanent director, Nathan Irving Huggins, many of the topics chosen during that decade reflected a distinctively rights-based agenda. Early speakers included the Nobel Prize-winning political economist from St Lucia, Sir William Arthur Lewis (1982), the African American civil rights advocate Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr (1984) and the children’s rights activist Marian Wright Edelman (1986). But then, following the appointment of Henry Louis Gates Jr and Kwame Anthony Appiah in 1991, the former as the new (and still current) director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Research Institute with, in the words of its website, ‘a mandate to assemble a world class team in Afro-American Studies’, there was a significant move away from law and the social sciences in the choice of Du Bois lecturers and a turn towards the humanities and cultural studies. Figures like Cornel West in 1992, Hazel Carby (1993), Arnold Rampersad (1998), and Homi Bhabha in 1999, were teachers and researchers of a very different stamp from those who spoke in the 1980s, leaning towards political and cultural criticism rather than social policy. As befits more troubled times this dialectical movement between contrasting intellectual projects has accelerated in recent years, the juxtaposition of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s ‘Du Bois at Large’ in 2009 and Condoleezza Rice’s ‘American Foreign Policy and the Black Experience’ in 2010 being an especially striking example.<sup>3</sup>

So, set against these often-contentious styles of thought, what kind of

1. Sarah J. Schaffer, ‘Lecturer Talks of Racial Divisions,’ *The Harvard Crimson*, April 26, 1994, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1994/4/26/lecturer-talks-of-racial-divisions-pracial/>

2. Du Bois had gained a PhD from Harvard University in 1895, the first African American scholar to receive this award. After a long and influential career he became a citizen of Ghana in the final year of his life, where he received a state funeral after his death at the age of 95.

3. Follow the links on the official website of the Du Bois Institute at <http://dubois.fas.harvard.edu/>; however, since this review was first drafted the section of the website covering the Du Bois Lectures has been monetised, so that recordings of previous speakers are only available on payment of a fee.

political intervention do Stuart Hall's lectures represent? We are extremely fortunate that the text of these lectures have survived and are now available in published form as *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation* (2017). In particular, our deepest thanks are due to the meticulous and loving editorial work carried out by Kobena Mercer who has not only established a definitive version of the 'manuscript materials' on which Hall drew, but has also provided a set of detailed bibliographical notes that allow the reader to reconstruct the theoretical context and cultural coordinates within which Hall's argument was taking shape (p215). In the light of the more than twenty-year gulf between the initial delivery of these lectures and their appearance in print Mercer's painstaking archival recovery fills a major gap in our understanding of Hall's oeuvre. As so often, Hall never turned these drafts into the long-promised monograph, always succumbing instead to other more immediate requests or political contingencies that demanded a closely argued response. Still, even had this book been completed in his lifetime, we can be sure that it would have been very different from the text that now stands before us.

In Hall's eyes, to revisit earlier ideas and analyses invariably required a reinvigorated intellectual effort simply because there was always 'a new conjuncture to understand', another unprecedented historico-political situation that had to be confronted and called to account. Consequently, if one was no longer the person one once had been, then 'to fully recuperate one's own processes of thought or creativity self-reflexively' was a virtual impossibility and the work had to be started all over again to deal with the exigencies of changed circumstances, within and without.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of this near-Sisyphean injunction, continuities *did* matter. In his posthumously published 'memoir' *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (2017), we find Hall explicitly returning to the very questions and answers that he had presented at the Du Bois Institute in 1994, as a way of making sense of his own experiences in moving from Jamaica to England and the role that 'race' had played within that protracted journey. With a characteristic deployment of a psychoanalytic trope, he describes it as the passage from one system of 'collective psychic disavowal', where race was both dominant *and* taboo, to another on whose terrain a new language of difference could gradually become imaginable, allowing those who had followed that same traumatic path 'to speak what was in us'.<sup>5</sup>

In the opening sentence of his Du Bois Lectures, Hall underscored the historical specificity of the experience from which he spoke by identifying it as 'a view from another part of the black Atlantic world' (p31). The phrasing of this statement alludes to the waves that Paul Gilroy's enormously influential 1993 book was already making within and outside the academy with its theorisation of a black diaspora that forms an 'ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble' throughout the modern world – words that Hall quotes and to which he recurs elsewhere in the lectures. But this frame of reference also emphasises how different his own perspective was

4. Stuart Hall, 'Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life,' (ed) Brian Meeks, *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2007, pp270, 290.

5. Stuart Hall (with Bill Schwarz), *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*, London, Allen Lane, 2017, pp95-105. Here Hall also selectively draws on the first volume of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1976.

from that of the speakers who had preceded him.<sup>6</sup> It is worth recalling that although Hall was heavily in demand at conferences and seminars in American universities and cultural foundations in the 1980s and 1990s, he never made his home in the United States but instead confined himself to relatively short, high-profile visits, in sharp contrast to the majority of Du Bois lecturers who typically have been American citizens or 'resident aliens.' And, while he would sometimes draw comparisons between the New Right's rise in America and that in Britain and frequently took up the larger debates about globalisation, postmodernism, or post-Fordism, the core of Hall's work was rooted in his engagement with British politics, particularly through his contributions to socialist publications like *Marxism Today* (1978-1991), memorably collected in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1988), and *Soundings* (from 1995 until his death in 2014). It is perhaps only fitting that his final resting-place was in Highgate, one of the most cosmopolitan of English cemeteries, not far from the graves of such eminent Victorians as George Eliot and Karl Marx or those of contemporary political activists like Claudia Jones and Hall's longstanding friend Raphael Samuel.

This tension between the Du Bois Institute's African American remit and Hall's own 'foothold in British radicalism' gives *The Fateful Triangle* a distinctive place among his writings.<sup>7</sup> Hall's thought rarely strayed very far from the analysis of the political moment in which he found himself, but overall these lectures take a rather long-term stance than the more conjuncturally-oriented pieces for which he is now best known. There are two defining features of the arguments on race, ethnicity, and nation that Hall develops here. The first is that his starting-point arises out of his dissatisfaction with the terms of contemporary debates about the precise trajectory followed by W. E. B. Dubois's thinking about race and modern society, in which Hall gives special attention to the interpretation offered by the philosopher Anthony Appiah in his 1985 essay 'The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race'.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, in pursuing this disagreement Hall specifically adopts what he calls 'a discursive-genealogical analysis' of 'the three terms of cultural difference' flagged up by his subtitle in order to allow each one 'to complicate and unsettle the others a little' (p32). Appiah too was no less in the business of unsettling the meaning of 'race', as his deployment of the word 'illusion' makes plain. But, more than this, the aim of Appiah's paper was to single out and commend a move he believed Du Bois could never quite make, a position that could never be fully embraced. In charting the effects and vicissitudes of 'the colour line' that so bitterly divided Americans, Appiah had claimed that Du Bois tacked between an acceptance that humankind could be divided into a small number of major races in which 'the physical differences of blood, colour and cranial measurements ... play a great part' and the view that 'a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and ... ideals of life' were far 'more important' in binding groups of people together.<sup>9</sup> In similar vein, a decade later, Du Bois applauded a growing recognition of

6. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, p198.

7. This phrase is used by Hall in the final paragraph of *Familiar Stranger* to describe the basis of the 'necessary distance from England and its values' that was vital to finding 'a modus vivendi' for his new life in the UK (p271).

8. Reprinted in (ed) Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Race, Writing, and Difference*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp21-37.

9. W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Conservation of Races' (1897) in (ed) David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, New York, Henry Holt, 1995, p22. Note that Du Bois follows the commonplace nineteenth-century practice of using the terms 'race' and 'nation' interchangeably as a way of denoting 'peoples.'

the importance of what he called the ‘long difference of [social and physical] environment’, an awareness that was undermining social scientists’ belief in inherently fixed or ‘pure’ racial distinctions and was forcing them to concede the richness and ongoing variety of human civilisation.<sup>10</sup>

10. W. E. B. Du Bois, ‘The First Universal Races Congress’ (1911) in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* pp46-7.

Nevertheless, as Appiah observes, by continuing to regard physiological traits as a ‘badge’ or ‘mark’ of exclusion and discrimination, Du Bois could not avoid retaining elements of the old biology of ‘race’, despite his efforts to reinterpret its vocabulary in terms of a shared cultural history of oppression. And today, Appiah argued, this contradiction left Du Bois’s work more exposed than ever. For if, as modern genetics has consistently indicated, comparisons *between* people from different racial groups show far *less* variation than those among individuals *within* a given set of supposed racial boundaries, then the sorts of criteria that have perennially been used to isolate racial differences become meaningless. On these grounds Appiah insists not only that we need to ditch any remaining biological basis for ‘our concept of race’, but presses for the abandonment of that concept altogether, treating it as a kind of category error which ignores the scientific evidence and serves as a barrier to a progressive politics.<sup>11</sup>

11. Anthony Appiah, ‘The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 12, No.1, pp21-37, p36.

Hall accepts Appiah’s case but doubts whether ‘race’ can be quite so easily exorcised and, even if it could, he is concerned that there is a danger of something important being lost. Part of the interest of Appiah’s reading of Du Bois is that it highlights the thoroughgoing instability of ‘racial discourse’ while also revealing its paradoxical tenacity. And it is the latter that most urgently requires explanation, since ‘race’ always returns. In a vividly sardonic metaphor Hall notes that, no sooner have the physical or biological signifiers of ‘the race concept’ been summarily critiqued and seen off the premises, than they will invariably ‘sidle around the edge of the veranda and climb back in through the pantry window!’ (p37). This protean quality of ‘race’ is due not simply to its distance from strict scientific standards and nor is Hall relying upon the strong Althusserian distinction between science and ideology here (though he does later give his argument a Marxist spin). Rather, he draws on the work of Michel Foucault, stressing that ‘racial discourse’ is best understood as an example of a ‘regime of truth’, a line of thought that posits an unbridgeable biological divide between human beings (replete with super-races and sub-human races) which is then interpreted as part of the natural order of things. Far from being confined to an ethereal zone of concepts or theories, such as those once found in discarded modes of science or religion, ‘racial thinking’ inhabits the domain of ordinary social practices, colouring our sense of the world we live in, even serving as a kind of practical wisdom. Moreover, to the extent that our most commonplace activities are shot through with ‘relations of power’ (p47), racial discourse takes its place among what Foucault identifies as the forms of ‘power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*)’ that lend shape and authority to our lives.

To highlight this point, Hall expands Foucault’s couplet to include a

‘necessary but silent third term’: ‘power-knowledge-difference’ (p60).<sup>12</sup> Hall links his account of racial discourse as ‘power-knowledge’ to one of the quintessential functions of ideology outlined by Marx and Engels in their unfinished critique of contemporary philosophy in the mid-1840s, known as *The German Ideology*. For them the force of ideology lay in its capacity to ‘naturalise’ phenomena that were originally the product of definite social and historical conditions, to make contingent beliefs and practices seem as though they were unchanging universals, permanent fixtures in the world we think we know. Although ‘race’ is not central to *The German Ideology* it is of course, among the most resilient of those apparently timeless Western constructs and its modern inception can be traced back to the beginning of ‘the process of imperial expansion’ when ‘Europeans of the Old World first encountered the peoples and cultures of the New World in the 1400s’ (p53). To explore the deadly present-day effects of ‘race’, Hall turns to Frantz Fanon’s painful depiction in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) of ‘ce jour blanc d’hiver’ when a little white French boy on a train cries out ‘Maman, regarde le nègre, j’ai peur!’, the emblematic moment when Fanon’s own bodily self-image breaks down and is supplanted by ‘un schéma épidermique racial’.<sup>13</sup> From that point on, Fanon could no longer experience himself as the French citizen from Martinique who was the equal of millions of others scattered across France and its empire, but had become publicly ‘fixé’ by what Hall characterises as ‘the inscription of racial difference on the skin’ (p62) and which Fanon famously compared to the role of a chemical fixative in a dye. Yet it is not merely this fetishising of difference that makes the interpolation of racial discourse so pernicious. As Hall goes on to argue, ‘the deep ambivalences of feeling, attitude, belief, and worldview’ cannot be secured by such stark binary structures as ‘primitive and civilised’ or even ‘them and us’ (p71). For what Fanon’s essays demonstrate is how closely bound up these categories are with the contradictory desires of the subjects who hold on to them. Consider Fanon’s chapter on ‘Le nègre et la psychopathologie’ where the free associations produced by the word ‘nègre’ in Fanon’s own clinical experiments – ‘biologique, sexe, fort, sportif, puissant, boxeur, ... sauvage, animal, diable, péché’ – are not so distant from the set of correspondences advanced by the self-declared *anti*-racist Michel Salomon when celebrating his own polymorphous infatuation with ‘l’image du nègre-biologique-sexuel-sensuel-et-génital’.<sup>14</sup> The ease with which these contiguous terms can be run in either direction is a sign that it is through the portal of fantasy that biological idioms consistently reappear and consolidate their grip.

While Hall does not cite these passages directly, his critical position on antiracism has some affinities with Fanon’s own remarks, especially in the lyrical concluding section of *Peau noire, masques blancs*. In Hall’s view, the lesson to be drawn from Fanon ‘is not the fixed difference of bodies or identities that remain immured in their otherness but the slippery, sliding system of similarities and differences that *is* the fully historicised conception of culture’,

12. Michel Foucault, ‘Truth and Juridical Forms’ (1973) in (ed) James D. Faubion, (trans), Robert Hurley et al, *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol.3*, London, Penguin, 2002, pp51-2.

13. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2015, pp109-111.

14. Fanon, pp162, 195.

a culture in which 'the racial signifier' is constantly on the move, unendingly in process (p71). This perceptible fluidity goes well beyond the general tendency in post-Saussurean linguistics for signifiers to lose their moorings and drift away from their underlying referents, since Hall is here deliberately supplementing his discursive-genealogical analysis with a Freudian-inspired model of aggression and erotic attachment – though his discussion lacks the caustic tone of Fanon's own complicated engagement with psychoanalysis. Thus, tarrying with the Manichean extremes of racial discourse is always fraught with danger, particularly where 'the violence of racism ... is structured around loss, the desire for the other that is inextricably coupled to its obliteration' (p74). Which is why it is so important for 'antiracist movements' to resist the temptation to switch the terms of a biologically-grounded narrative of racial unfreedom from negative to positive in a bid to create a 'special, privileged or even exceptional position for blacks in human history', a strategy which only serves to perpetuate the psycho-linguistic binaries that lie at the core of 'racial oppression' (p75).<sup>15</sup> In any case, new identities will inevitably continue to bubble to the surface of social life, remade in the light of new conditions and new conjunctures, a process that is unstoppable for 'there is *no way of limiting or trying to fix the varieties of subjects that black people will become*' (p78, emphasis in original).

Hall had put forward an early version of this argument in the late 1980s in a series of talks in which he contrasted what he called 'new and old ethnicities, new and old identities', partly in an attempt to address his own sense of puzzlement at seeing how the most disadvantaged young black Britons increasingly looked as though 'they own the territory' they occupy, a heady mix of confidence and marginality.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, when exploring the politics of 'race' in the first Du Bois Lecture, Hall cites this work as part of his discussion of antiracism. But, as he is quick to point out, this earlier use of the term 'ethnicity' in Britain raises Anthony Appiah's question as to the redundancy of 'race' in a novel and challenging form: if the notion of an identity based upon 'race' is increasingly being 'transcoded' or transvalued, should we not turn instead to a more flexible, more culturally-sensitive concept like 'ethnicity', where 'race' is one element among others? – as Hall himself had been inclined to do a few years earlier.<sup>17</sup> However, this question is not as innocent as it sounds, particularly when raised in a North American context. Hall notes that in the United States the image of society as 'an ethnic melting-pot' came to serve as what was in effect a state philosophy of migrant assimilation, one of the nation's 'primary foundational myths' premised on the offer of a better life (p84). But a transnational emancipatory address to the world's 'tired ... poor ... huddled masses' sits uncomfortably with the history of forced migration and brutalised labour that constituted the practice of slavery. So one reason for retaining the concept of 'race' in all its contradictions is to preserve the political memory of the role of the slave trade in the birth of the American nation – and in the history of the wealth

15. 'La densité de l'Histoire ne détermine aucun de mes actes. Je suis mon propre fondement.' Fanon, p224. See also Stuart Hall's 1995 ICA lecture 'The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks?*' in Alan Read (ed), *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, London & Seattle, Institute of Contemporary Arts/ Bay Press, 1996, pp13-37.

16. Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves' in Lisa Appignanesi (ed), *Identity: The Real Me*, London, ICA Documents 6, 1987, p44.

17. In an earlier ICA talk in January 1989, Hall described how a series of articles in the *Daily Mail* under the rubric 'Who are the British?' had seriously weakened his 'commitment to the notion of rethinking ethnicity.' Stuart Hall, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics' in (ed) Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1995, p67.



of Western nations more generally. Hall is well aware that this insight partly recapitulates Du Bois's claim that the semiotics of 'race' can serve as a 'badge' of suffering, of a shared 'heritage'. But he goes on to add a vital caveat: the stories of these struggles cannot be taken as a given. They must always be rewritten and reimagined for new political moments.

A key example of this process that Hall discusses is the role of the signifier 'black' in the British antiracist struggles of the 1970s and 1980s in which sections of the British Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities formed a political alliance based upon the similarities in their colonial and imperially mediated experiences of marginality. This cross-identification was never straightforward, no more than was the influence upon them of the US civil rights mobilisation, a movement that had its own distinctive history and political dynamic. But the idea of 'blackness' did provide a common ground for campaigns and agitation around discrimination, police harassment, and social exclusion. However, in the medium term this coalition had two contradictory effects. Although it succeeded in creating a militant political identity around the figure of the 'black Briton', this nomenclature was soon adopted by government institutions like the police force and the school system and began to be incorporated into official population statistics as a social category that quickly became the object of state policy. Thus, beginning with the 1991 Census, respondents were asked to indicate 'What is your ethnic group?' by choosing from a menu of labels such as 'White', 'Black Caribbean', 'Black African', 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Chinese', or, alternatively, by describing their 'ethnicity' in their own words if none of these appellations seemed to fit. As this list suggests, a complex *pas de deux* was now being played out between 'race' and 'ethnicity' – Hall likens their interaction to a game of hide-and-seek – as they moved across the same linguistic terrain of histories, customs, traditions, kinship, descent, and ancestry, though in sharply opposed directions. That is to say, 'ethnicity' also operates as a 'sliding signifier'; but, whereas 'race' has tended to gravitate towards biology and genetics, 'ethnicity' is typically pulled into the sphere of culture where it is often equated with, to invoke one of its most frequently used synonyms, a 'minority group', a community that is invariably subordinated to and judged by the demands of the societal mainstream. In the United States, for example, there have been times when those accused of belonging to 'disloyal' minorities were cuttingly contrasted with so-called 'model minorities', playing off one against another – and under such political conditions, where signification becomes erratic, the approved direction of civic travel can rapidly be thrown into reverse, tainting these allegedly retrograde ethnicities with the inassimilable biology of 'race'.<sup>18</sup>

For Hall the shifting fortunes of the term 'black British' represents 'a moment of the ethnicisation of the nation' where antiracist politics are increasingly displaced by 'discourses of cultural difference' (p99). It is clear that this process has taken new directions since 2003 with both

18. See Shawn Wong's contribution to the roundtable 'Is Ethnicity Obsolete?' in Werner Sollors (ed), *The Invention of Ethnicity*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp230-1.

19. For further discussion of the current relationship between 'faith communities' and government social policy, see the *Public Spirit* website: [www.publicspirit.org.uk/](http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/)

20. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Gareth Stedman Jones (ed), London, Penguin, 2002, p222.

New Labour and the Cameron-led Coalition actively extending the idea of 'ethnicity' to include religious groups in order to underwrite a 'faith-based' version of multiculturalism, with local places of worship serving as agencies of 'integration', partners of the state that are encouraged to assist in implementing government policies, as in the case of Muslim participation in the highly controversial counter-terrorist Prevent Strategy.<sup>19</sup> Why then has 'ethnicity' undergone such a significant revival and valorisation since the 1990s, virtually becoming a new cultural dominant? In pursuing this question Hall again takes the long view, arguing that the answer lies in the historical trajectory through which 'late modern globalisation' came to set the political and socio-economic agenda for the present and the future.

Although Hall had already touched on this theme earlier in the discussion, globalisation is the principal concern in the remainder of the lectures. As in other sections of the book, Hall's take on globalisation emerges through an extended dialogue with Marxism and liberalism. Like most thinkers on the Left, Hall stresses the disruptive impact of the growth of a world market, echoing Marx's account of the way in which 'naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation' remorselessly undermined the traditional certainties of the past. But, against the grain of classical Marxism, Hall is also concerned to develop an account of the 'constant revolutionising of production' and the 'uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions' that puts the question of cultural difference at the heart of the process.<sup>20</sup> This project necessarily entails a critique of the thesis that there has been a secular tendency towards the polarisation and homogenisation of social divisions in industrialising societies but also, by implication, of more nuanced Marxist characterisations of economic expansion in terms of its combined and uneven development. The crux of Hall's radical revision of this kind of grand narrative lies in the inability of capital to control the forces that it unleashes, in part because of the inherently decentred nature of markets themselves and in part because of the failure of this unstable, crisis-ridden system to fully satisfy the human needs from which it seeks to profit. Despite the very real dominance of global brands within modern cultures, there is an equally strong counter-tendency towards local attachments and identities that operate over and against the interdependent worldwide production networks and supply chains that seek to draw them in. But these are not neat unadulterated oppositions, observes Hall: after all, 'where would you draw the line in rap or reggae between differences permeated by the market and differences that signify social ruptures?' He therefore regards the sorts of ethnicities to which these phenomena give rise as 'looser, more porous, more open-ended, and increasingly hybridised forms of cultural identity' that break down any hard and fast distinction between the local and the global (p116).

Of course, there is a sense in which global capitalism has always worked with difference, despite its reluctance to acknowledge the true history of its own dominion. In their search for competitive advantage businesses have recruited across family and caste lines to set up the modern sweatshop



system in South-east Asia or relied upon low-paid seasonal migrant workers in Europe or traded in African slaves, and each of these brutalising strategies has contributed to the segmentation of a world market in labour along ethnic or racial or gendered lines. But sooner or later these divisions have revealed a nucleus of resistance with the capacity ultimately to transform this experience of oppression by forging *new* cultural and political subjects. On one level, these economic practices are coterminous with the restless worldwide flows of capital, goods, services, information, and technology, and highlight the increasingly precarious situation of the vast majority of labourers. And yet, the movement of peoples is also a phenomenon *sui generis* with its own specific patterns of cause and effect. Hall rightly draws attention to the broad split between the global North and the global South, with the impoverishment of the latter resulting from the atrophy of local and regional economies, the over-exploitation of natural resources, the stranglehold of international debt, and the ruinous escalation in climate change which have forced growing numbers of individuals and families to attempt the most hazardous journeys across land and sea in an often desperate search for a better life in the affluent zones of the world, especially Europe and North America. Since these lectures were delivered in 1994, the total figure for international migrants has risen by sixty-two per cent, rising to 257.7 million in 2017.<sup>21</sup>

With the exception of a relatively brief reference to ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian conflict, chiefly in the context of the revival of ethnic nationalism in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hall has much less to say here about the impact of war on citizenship, governmentality, and the state (pp155-8). Yet not only do wars play a central role in the large-scale transfer of populations – it was during the Second World War, for example, that the young Frantz Fanon and his fellow volunteers in a light infantry battalion from the Antilles first set eyes on France and Algeria – but in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries international warfare has redrawn national boundaries, reconstructed the relationship between states and economies, and created new supra-national legal and administrative arrangements for dealing with the appalling refugee problems that have been their inevitable by-product. In many respects we are still living in the extended aftermath of the Second World War, a *débâcle* that generated a population of refugees and displaced persons estimated at 175 million across the globe, at least fourteen times the number produced by the First World War twenty-seven years earlier.<sup>22</sup> Hall's final lecture addresses the dialectic between nation-states and diasporas, two closely-connected incubators of cultural and political identity which have tended to be mutually antagonistic – though there are of course important historical instances, such as the founding of the state of Israel, where these twin social forces have converged.

At first sight, nations seem to be the *sine qua non* of modern collective life. But throughout the last century, numerous groups of people have been denied full membership of the states to which they once appeared to belong

21. See the website of the *International Organization for Migration*: <https://www.iom.int>

22. Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p3.

– Jews in Russia at the *fin-de-siècle* and again in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and Asians in Uganda in the early 1970s are among the very many cases one could cite. Indeed, it is an essential attribute of nation-states that they are the ultimate arbiters of which sections of the population living within their borders can or cannot enjoy full civic rights, including rights of residence. In consequence, Hall's arguments about the nation-state take the same general form as his discussion of 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Once again Hall is focussing upon a social signifier that comes with no inherent or pre-given political complexion (regardless of its system of government) and is therefore far more fluid than its solid institutional presence would suggest. Every nation-state has its distinctive historical attachments and vulnerabilities – as witness the choice of the name 'Queer Nation' by HIV/AIDS activists organising against anti-gay and lesbian violence and prejudice in major cities in the United States in the early 1990s, a label that both borrowed from the intense solidarity of national belonging but also issued a provocative call for inclusion. This depiction of the nation as a force-field of competing energies and aspirations reflects the major influence of the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin on Hall's thought not only when he was devising these lectures, but also throughout the 1990s as a whole, particularly Bakhtin's insistence on 'the heteroglossia of culture, the multiple repertoires on which it draws, and the new combinations it is constantly making' (p78).<sup>23</sup> Bakhtin takes 'dialogism' as the key to how the social world functions, arguing that every form of discourse or way of speaking 'lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context' since the 'living utterances' that pass between individuals and groups always involve an 'opaque mixing of languages' where contexts constantly change and meanings necessarily shift.<sup>24</sup> Hall regards this principle as central to the diasporic condition, but it works against the ways in which members of these cultures would often prefer to see themselves, that is as defenders of hallowed traditions or devotees of an imperishable myth of origins. In reality, their uprootedness puts them into a position where they are increasingly 'obliged to interact', to create new spaces for themselves, 'to inhabit more than one identity, dwell in more than one culture', to work with and across languages (pp166, 173).

It would be misleading to regard this 'new diasporic consciousness' as an uncomplicated advance, let alone a privileged state of being, but Hall does see it as having a vital metaphorical importance in gesturing towards opportunities for change in this difficult and contradictory time of late globalisation. Although these displaced subjects carry the marks of the 'symbolic and material violence' that have accompanied them since the beginning of their journeys, their different modes of diasporic experience also irresistibly encourage critical comparisons between their places of origin, subsequent destinations, and forms of exile, as well as the plight of others in similar situations (p166). To cite one notorious example, many of the substantial numbers of the Muslim Rohingyas who fled persecution and

23. For important discussions of Bakhtin, see Stuart Hall, 'What is this 'black' in black popular culture?' (1992) and 'For Allon White: Metaphors of Transformation' (1993), reprinted in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds), London and New York, Routledge, 1996, pp287-305 and 365-475.

24. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, (trans), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (eds), Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, pp284, 361.

discrimination in Burma (re-named Myanmar in 1989) over the past forty years – in 1978, in 1991-92, and now again in 2017-18 – have settled in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states where they have been called Asia's 'New Palestinians'. Cumulative histories of this kind, together with the ambiguous status these communities continue to occupy as 'non-nationals' or 'resident foreigners', even in their former homelands, pose a serious challenge to the ruling dogmas of race, ethnicity and national belonging across the Middle East and South-east Asia.<sup>25</sup> In these circumstances events move to what Hall later called 'a different rhythm', producing 'a new', but not necessarily a safer, 'moment'.<sup>26</sup>

Hall was too much of a hard-headed realist to close his eyes and ears to the possibility that dialogism might stall and just as easily fail, that the conversation around cultural difference could degenerate into a shouting match, 'a big, staged, continuous row' with losers on every side, before things could begin to edge slowly and painfully forward.<sup>27</sup> So, alongside the 'metaphors of transformation' there are also warnings to heed. We should note Hall's ominous rewriting of lines from Benjamin's sixth and ninth theses 'On the Concept of History' at the close of his final lecture. In Hall's rendition the 'nation' appears as 'a Janus-like phenomenon, always flashing up, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, at a moment of danger, one face turned to the future, the other casting its hooded eyes of stone toward the past' (pp158-9). It is as though the image of the 'angel' that Benjamin took from Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* has returned as a kind of basilisk, its deadening gaze looking on without the faintest hope of making 'whole what has been smashed'.<sup>28</sup> This unexpectedly poetic allusion serves as a timely indication that in the eye of the political storm, amidst the clamour of contending voices, and beyond the many still unsettled questions that Hall has raised, the nation-state remains, as Nietzsche memorably wrote, 'the coldest of cold monsters' and never more so than when it claims to speak in the name of 'the people'.<sup>29</sup> But, as Stuart Hall tirelessly reminded us, it is through the intensive relay between representations 'of 'nation'', of 'national cultures/alien cultures', [and] of 'our people'" that the 'respectable signifiers' underpinning a whole culture of racism have officially been set in place.<sup>30</sup>

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25. See Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1998, pp202-4, 226-9.

26. Stuart Hall and Les Back, 'In Conversation: At Home and Not At Home,' *Cultural Studies* 23: 4, 2009, p665.

27. Stuart Hall in conversation with Bill Schwarz, 'Living with Difference,' *Soundings* 37, Winter, 2007, p152.

28. Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' (1940) in (eds) Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2003, pp391-2.

29. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885) cited in Tracy Strong 'Nietzsche and Politics' in Robert C. Solomon (ed), *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New York, Anchor Books, 1973, pp280-1.

30. Stuart Hall, 'Popular Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of "Taking Democracy Seriously"' (1980) in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London and New York, Verso, 1988, pp145-6.