



FAMILIAR STRANGER

A Life between Two Islands

Stuart Hall

with **Bill Schwarz**

Familiar Stranger

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A Life Between Two Islands

STUART HALL

WITH BILL SCHWARZ

Duke University Press

Durham and London | 2017

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Published in the United States by Duke University Press, 2017

Published in Great Britain by Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin
Random House, 2017

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

Cover design by Amy Ruth Buchanan

Set in Dante MT Std.

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hall, Stuart, 1932–2014, author. | Schwarz, Bill, 1951– editor. |

Hall, Stuart, 1932–2014. Works. Selections. 2016.

Title: Familiar stranger : a life between two islands / Stuart Hall and
Bill Schwarz.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2017. |

Series: Stuart Hall : selected writings | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017001890 (print) | LCCN 2017004591 (ebook)

ISBN 9780822363873 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9780822372936 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Hall, Stuart, 1932–2014. |

Sociologists—Jamaica—Biography. | Sociologists—Great

Britain—Biography. | Jamaicans—Great Britain—Biography.

Classification: LCC HM479.H35 A3 2017 (print) | LCC HM479.H35 (ebook) |

DDC 301.092 [B]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017001890>

Cover art: Family photograph. Courtesy of Janet Mendelsohn.

For Catherine

What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? Where does it end?

Madame Merle, in Henry James,
The Portrait of a Lady (1881)

. . . one simply cannot and will never be able to fully recuperate one's own processes of thought or creativity self-reflexively . . . I cannot become identical with myself.

Stuart Hall, 'Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life',
in Brian Meeks (ed.), *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora:*
The Thought of Stuart Hall (2007)

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Preface

Bill Schwarz

This is Stuart Hall's book, comprising his story. Those familiar with his writings will know, however, that through his lifetime he was committed to working and writing collaboratively, often with people much younger than he was. No book exists which is authored solely by him. And this book, too, carries traces of other hands.

There was never a single moment when Hall decided that he was going to embark either on a memoir or on a project of this kind, at least not on the scale on which it turned out. Some twenty years ago he and I were contracted to submit a short manuscript in the form of a conversation seeking to illuminate the major contours of his intellectual life. He was won both by the brevity and by the dialogic potential of the venture. We signed the contract and, after some predictable delays, a series of recorded interviews took place. I spent a summer transcribing them, and with that done we'd more or less hit the word limit. The transcription I passed to him contained lengthy annotations, queries and suggestions, as well as a handful of additional questions which needed to be addressed. We were, we imagined, close to completion.

As things turned out we weren't close at all. Hall set about revising and adding to the text, a practice he could never resist as new ideas kept on taking shape in his mind and, on the horizon, he spotted emergent intellectual and political controversies summoning him. Other things – major, urgent preoccupations – intervened for him. We talked regularly and when time allowed he would make sorties on the manuscript. But time passed and progress was slow.

In his last years illness took its toll. Big projects could no longer

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be undertaken. His mobility lessened and increasingly he found himself housebound. He missed being active in the world. Yet as his body faltered his intellectual restlessness did not. On many matters of the day he felt impelled to have his say. When health allowed he returned to the manuscript and worked on it like a demon. It assumed a renewed significance, representing a lifeline. *Optimism of the will*.

During this period we talked endlessly about the project. He quizzed me, along with countless others, about whatever happened to be on his mind, depending where in the manuscript he'd arrived. He'd jot down notes and return to the computer, maintaining the dialogic structure as he worked. His intellectual lucidity remained true to the end. When he died in February 2014 the manuscript had grown to over 300,000 words.

While his lucidity had not diminished, his capacity to organize a huge, complex manuscript, ranging far and wide over a lifetime's intellectual evolution, was intermittent. In his mind's eye he held a clear idea of the co-ordinates of the final outcome, which he always imagined as a single volume. These comprised the portion which is published here; further chapters on culture, reviewing the range of attendant theoretical debates; a long section on the properties of 'the political' and on the onset of neo-liberalism; and finally chapters devoted to black subjectivity, aesthetics and politics. Some of these were drafted or half drafted; some were in note form; and others existed only as a mental vision.

Owing to deteriorating eyesight, much was composed from memory alone. Seldom could he consult the necessary sources. Readers will find, for example, that there are stories related here which appear elsewhere. In a number of cases the versions don't tally. I decided that on such occasions I shouldn't intervene. This can be a task, if it is ever deemed necessary, for scholars of the future. As Hall says at one point, he was at the end 'fated to mix history with memory and desire – a combination which future historians will treat with due suspicion'.

It's been my job to extract from the overall manuscript what appears here, on his early life, and a sequel which explores the rela-

tions between culture and politics. As readers will appreciate, in these circumstances the book can't represent a pure or innocent rendition of Hall's words. The prose presented here is based on the original transcribed interviews; on his subsequent written revisions and the many enlargements, in various states of completion; and on scores of discussions and conversations spanning nearly two decades. Some parts are verbatim, while many others have been constructed from fragments. Organizing the manuscript has involved much labour.

To begin with we retained the original dialogic structure, as Hall was keen that we should, dividing the text between two identifiable voices: the questioner, 'Bill'; and the respondent, 'Stuart'. Even so, the actual interplay between the two voices was inevitably a deal less transparent than this suggested. The book had evolved as a shared manuscript, which changed hands between Stuart and myself over many years for revision and emendation. Over time the authorial provenance of many passages slipped from view. It was as a conversation that the book had been conceived and how it progressed through its early incarnations. At a late stage, however, in discussion with our publishers, the decision was made to recast the manuscript as a first-person narrative. Initially we had misgivings. But we quickly came to be persuaded by the virtue of this solution. Hall's voice is the clearer for it. And while the formal dialogue has disappeared, the dialogic inspiration accounts for the interior organization of the existing narrative. We endeavoured, also, to maintain the conversational tone.

Paul Thompson kindly allowed us to borrow an important segment from his own interview with Hall that covered a significant lacuna. Stuart was conscious of the debt he owed his friends Sally Alexander, Beatrice Campbell and Jacqueline Rose who, when the going got tough, would read to him material which otherwise would have been unavailable to him. Nick Beech proved a significant support to Stuart in the final phase and has contributed to the completion of this volume by supplying a cache of articles, papers and references when I needed them, even when he had a million more pressing matters to attend to. Michael Rustin, one of

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Stuart's family and a comrade in arms of old, provided crucial additional information on the vicissitudes of the New Left.

From the beginning Hall looked to Duke University Press in the US as the ideal home for his work. Duke have been serious in bringing to publication the works of Marcus Garvey and of C. L. R. James and he was delighted by the prospect that his writings would appear alongside them. Ken Wissoker of the Press made the commitment to publish as complete a list of Hall's writings as we believed desirable. This was an extraordinarily spirited, generous offer from a publisher in these days when the trade becomes ever more cut-throat. Plans are afoot for a series of volumes, for the most part organized thematically. We could not have asked for more from Ken and his team. Nor could Stuart. They have given us all that we could have wished. Our thanks to him and to Elizabeth Ault are profound.

On the advice of Neil Belton, in the UK, we approached Tom Penn at Penguin whose enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the project were instant. Tom's investment in the book has remained unfailing, and his sympathies for Hall's work run deep. We are most grateful to him and to Chloe Currens. Thanks to their intervention we are sure this is a better book. We owe much, also, to Linden Lawson whose work as the copy-editor has been supreme.

In assembling and completing this manuscript I thank the Rockefeller Foundation for awarding me a Fellowship at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. Not only did this provide me with the time and space to complete the manuscripts. The Center is also, in these hard times, magnificent testament to the virtues of the sovereignty of the imagination. I shall always remember everyone there with deep, deep warmth.

Great thanks are due to Caroline Knowles who lived closely, and calmly, with this project as it drew to its completion while I, commensurately, grew ever more frenzied. I'll always treasure her support.

None of this would have happened without the generosity, thoughtfulness and constant goodwill of Stuart's family. Seeing

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through to publication this most personal of his writings has not always been easy. His children, Becky and Jess, have acted with both enthusiasm and care. His wife, Catherine, has kept a close eye on my welfare, even when she has had so much else to preoccupy her. She has been involved at every stage in the preparation of the manuscript. I owe her more than I can say.

For me the outstanding difficulty is that Stuart himself was unable to adjudicate on the finished draft. I can imagine his many reservations. He could never return to his writing without being tempted to take it apart and to drive the argument on, or to take it in new directions. This certainly would have been no exception. It pains me greatly that he wasn't able to read what has finally been submitted in his name.