

Stuart Hall on rootless cosmopolitanism

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Here's an interesting interview with Stuart Hall, in which he speaks about cosmopolitanism and rootedness — relevant to the previous post:

<http://www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1119965>

Pinna Werbner interviewing — I've transcribed the most relevant bit below.

23.30

PW: Can you be a cosmopolitan if you don't have to commitments to a place or people or maybe even culture? Is it possible to be a cosmopolitan without this rootedness somewhere?

SH: Well I would have said not, and I think I'm afraid of the word because it sort of suggests that. It sort of invokes a kind of cultureless, rootedless image of a person who's free-floating sampling all the cultures, like my global entrepreneur in the first-class waiting room of some airport is a good idea – they love a bit of Japanese cooking, Indian cooking here, French cuisine there. They sample all of them but none comes from a attachment to a particular way of handling food et cetera. That doesn't mean you need to eat that way all the time but you sort of know what it is like to be attached. I think that without that the old Marxist jibe 'rootless cosmopolitanism' has some substance to it.

I think in many ways, this is where we encounter an interesting interface with one aspect of liberalism which exactly thinks we can only really calculate what individuals are like when we free them from all their attachments: no religion, no culture nothing, free floating atoms contracting with other free floating atoms, and I think this is exactly one of the limitations of liberalism. It has never understood culture, not [that] it has never sunk itself into culture, it has never "understood" culture. This idea of the atomised individual has of course played it's role. The notion of the rule of law depends on a certain abstraction from cultures and particularities, so it does have it's value, but it's never understood that it's always underpinned by its own culture. There's no liberal democracy that doesn't have roots in a particular community....

So, I believe in that locatedness, in position, attachment, but I believe that those are rarely singular. I don't think they overlap, that the attachment to community is the same as the attachment to culture, and I think that all of that has to be aware of its limits.