

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of East London (UEL)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Reviving progressive politics and culture in the UK		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Jeremy Gilbert	Professor of Cultural Studies	1997 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		

**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Jeremy Gilbert's widely circulated political and cultural commentary has been cited as influential by journalists, MPs, and key figures at prominent think tanks, NGOs and campaigning organisations. As a significant public intellectual, his commentary and podcasting have shaped and influenced the thinking of tens of thousands of readers and listeners. This influence is underpinned by two decades of research into contemporary politics, culture, and social theory.

**2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

Gilbert's research into contemporary politics and culture, social movements, and political theory over the last two decades has investigated a number of consistent themes. At a conceptual and analytic level, it has sought to continue the tradition of 'conjunctural analysis' associated with the classic tradition of British cultural studies, bringing to bear a historical, sociological and critical perspective on emergent social and political phenomena. It presents an historically informed understanding of contemporary culture, politics, and society, interrogating the complex relationships between social, technological, economic, and political change.

Of most relevance to the wider impact of the academic work, are two central theses:

- That, in approaching contemporary social problems and forms of political organization, it is necessary to prioritise democratic methods and aspirations.
- That organizations and individuals committed to progressive ends should collaborate and coordinate their activities to achieve realistic objectives, overcoming sectarian and organizational divisions between 'party' and 'movement' politics, and between representatives of different political traditions (including liberal, socialist, anarchist, green).

This research argues that cultural studies itself needs to be understood as a critical practice with an explicitly public and democratic vocation. Gilbert's positions were initially laid out in the co-edited collection *Cultural capitalism* (R1) and developed in *Anticapitalism and culture* (R2). This book situated the practice of contemporary cultural studies in the broad history of Anglophone progressive politics and argued for a realignment of forces on the left of British politics. It suggested that alliances between radical movements engaged in extra-parliamentary activity and the institutions of electoral politics, most notably the Labour Party, were key to political progress, at a time when any such development seemed highly unlikely.

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These ideas were further developed in *Common ground* (R3), wherein he argued for contemporary politics combining with radical democratic aspirations, sympathy for the tradition of cultural radicalism, and a willingness to challenge the neoliberal political consensus. Gilbert investigated the political implications of contemporary and classical theories of individuation, collective agency, and affect. His formulation of an ethic of 'collective joy' in that work has since been taken up by activists and commentators. *Neoliberal culture* (R4) is a collection, edited and with an introduction (p5-6) and a chapter (p7-22: "What Kind of Thing is 'Neoliberalism'?") by Gilbert, analysing the nature and scope of neoliberalism as a political project, suggesting important parameters for conceptualizing alternatives to it.

Gilbert's own analysis of the current socio-cultural conjuncture was most fully articulated in his essay "This conjuncture: for Stuart Hall" (R5) which develops his concept of the 'long 90s' (first proposed in a keynote paper given at the University of Leeds, 2015 subsequently published on Gilbert's blog). *Twenty-first-century socialism* (R6) condenses and summarises many of the findings and arguments developed in this work for a wider, non-academic readership, as have his many contributions to outlets such as *open Democracy* and the *Guardian*.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

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R1. Bewes, T., Gilbert, J. and Bewes, J. eds., 2000. *Cultural Capitalism: Politics after New Labour*. Lawrence & Wishart Limited.

R2. Gilbert, J., 2008. *Anticapitalism and culture: Radical theory and popular politics* (p. 224). Berg Publishers.

R3. Gilbert, J., 2013. *Common ground: Democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism*. Pluto Press.

R4. Gilbert, J., 2016. *Neoliberal culture*. Lawrence & Wishart.

R5. Gilbert, J., 2019. This Conjuncture: For Stuart Hall. *New Formations*, 96(96-97), pp.5-37. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF:96/97.EDITORIAL.2019>

R6. Gilbert, J., 2020. *Twenty-First Century Socialism*. John Wiley & Sons.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

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"Jeremy has played a significant role in British public life for many years now; in fact, it is hard to think of many currently working academics who have so consistently bridged the gaps between activism, academic theory and public-facing commentary." Jon Cruddas, Labour MP (S1)

#### Influencing campaigning groups, think-tanks, and politicians.

Both of his books, *Common Ground* and *Twenty-first-century Socialism*, have been cited as influential by municipal and national elected representatives, senior figures at think-tanks and NGOs, and activists and political organisers:

- Neal Lawson, director of Compass, wrote: "As a leading advocate for pluralist and radical democratic politics ... he has been a direct influence on some of Compass' key political decisions: e.g., our decision to persistently focus on democratisation of public services and governmental institutions as a key political objective, and our 2017 campaign for a 'progressive alliance' of British political parties. His pamphlet *Reclaim Modernity*, co-authored with Mark Fisher and published by us in 2015 (S2), remains foundational to all of our thinking on contemporary politics and culture", and his 2017 pamphlet on coalitions 'directly inspired several and successful significant local campaigns during that election." (S3)

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- Mathew Lawrence, Institute for Public Policy Research and Common Wealth (think-tanks): “Jeremy’s work was hugely influential on our programme of work [at IPPR] exploring political inequality in the UK and how to build a more participative 21st century democracy. Latterly, his work [... has] underpinned a new organisation I founded in 2019, Common Wealth, which was set up to design ownership models for a democratic economy.” (S4)

Gilbert has been an informal advisor to prominent Labour MPs including Jon Cruddas, Jon Trickett, Sam Tarry and Clive Lewis, and to some of the most **senior parliamentary advisors** to the party leadership **shaping political debate** (e.g., S1, S5).

“I’ve been consistently influenced, and often directly guided, by Jeremy Gilbert’s thinking and analysis. My critical support for Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party, but also for causes such as the Green New Deal, electoral reform and pluralist, multi-party politics have all been directly influenced by his writing” Clive Lewis, Labour MP (S5).

During his campaign for the party leadership in 2020, Lewis spoke through national media outlets about the need to address the UK’s ‘crisis of democracy’; a phrase derived directly from *Common Ground* (S6a).

### Engagement with public discourse

Gilbert’s work has helped to shape and inform public attitudes and values, enhancing cultural understanding, challenging conventional wisdom, and stimulating debate.

- Extensively cited and interviewed by journalists and commentators in *The Guardian*, *New Statesman* and *Financial Times*, and named by several journalists from *The Guardian* as a key figure on the British Left. (S6a-e).
- Work on radical democracy, the legacy of the counterculture, and ‘collective joy’ in culture, music and politics generated a flurry of press interest and interviews in the national and international press 2017-2019 (S7) and invitations to contribute to formal discussions of public policy issues (S8a-b), as well as a popular podcast on the successful media platform Novara Media, with a lively and dedicated following. The podcasts received 15-20,000 listeners per episode, representing a significant contribution to public debate (S9).
- The ‘Culture, Power and Politics’ series of lectures, of which he is a principal organizer and presenter, reach a diverse audience outside the academy. He delivers lectures at the Ridley Road Market Bar (49 Ridley Road, Dalston, London, E8 2NP) and they are also podcast. Simon Jarvis of Bristol says: “As a construction worker with no graduate qualifications, the recorded Culture, Power, Politics lectures have been an invaluable resource for me. Having access to free left-wing teaching of such a high standard has given me the confidence and the inspiration to become Political Education Officer for my local Labour Party. As well as delivering and running training sessions I have been directly inspired by Jeremy to run reading groups and to take a ‘consciousness raising’ style approach to debates and other political education events.” (S10)

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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S1. Testimonial statement from Labour MP Jon Cruddas.

S2. Fisher, M. and Gilbert, J. 2014. *Reclaim modernity: beyond markets beyond machines*. Compass. Report. <https://www.compassonline.org.uk/publications/reclaiming-modernity-beyond-markets-beyond-machines/>

S3. Testimonial statement from Neal Lawson, Executive Director, Compass.

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- S4.** Testimonial statement from Mathew Lawrence, formerly Institute for Public Policy Research, founder and director of Common Wealth.
- S5.** Testimonial statement from Labour MP Clive Lewis.
- S6.** Examples of media coverage of Gilbert's position:
- S6a.** Heather Stewart. 2020. Clive Lewis: to beat Tories, Labour has to work with other progressives. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/07/clive-lewis-to-beat-tories-labour-has-to-work-with-other-progressives>
- S6b.** Aditya Chakraborty. 2015. Jeremy Corbyn's politics of hope can seize power from the elite. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/14/jeremy-corbyn-austerity-labour-leader-economy>
- S6c.** George Monbiot. 2016. Labour can still survive, but only if it abandons hope of governing alone. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/05/labour-survive-governing-alone-political-alliance-unity-british-left-power>
- S6d.** Joshua Chaffin. 2017. Generational guilt' attracts older voters to Labour. *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/9326600e-c498-11e7-b2bb-322b2cb39656>
- S6e.** George Eaton. 2018. The meaning of Corbynism. *The New Statesman*. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/03/meaning-corbynism>
- S7.** Casper Hughes C. 2018. Acid Corbynism: Why we need to create a new counterculture. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/acid-corbynism-labour-jeremy-corbyn-counterculture-a8231936.html>
- S8a.** Gilbert, J. 2019. *Education for a Healthy Democracy*. Institute for Public Policy Research. [future-of-education-sept19.pdf \(ippr.org\)](http://www.ippr.org/future-of-education-sept19.pdf)
- S8b.** Jeremy Gilbert. 2019. "The only way Labour can win is by ditching Labourism." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/31/only-way-labour-win-ditch-labourism-corbyn> (1,753 comments, 669 shares)
- S9.** Media platform, Novara Media. <https://novaramedia.com/2020/03/01/acfm-microdose-musical-cities/>
- S10.** Testimonial statement from Simon Jarvis, regular listener of the Culture, Power and Politics series of seminars and podcasts. Event list: [Ridley Road Market Bar](#)