

(People who have influenced me most, by Alan Macfarlane)

Jack Goody (c.1918-)

Some people have influenced me through the force of their ideas, some through the force of their personality. The distinguished Cambridge anthropologist, Professor Jack Goody has combined these. He has undoubtedly been the strongest influence on my career as an anthropologist.

I first came across Jack's work during my M.Phil at the L.S.E. in 1967. He was clearly a friend, or at least junior colleague, of my supervisor Isaac Schapera. Schapera had suggested or agreed that I did my 30,000 word dissertation on the history of sexual and marital relations in early modern England. When I came to write on incest and marriage, I read several articles by Jack Goody and used them in my thesis. Jack was on the Board of *Past and Present* and perhaps knew of me through Keith Thomas.

Jack was appointed my M.Phil. examiner, which was when I first met him. I did not form an enormously favourable impression at first I think. I found his articles interesting, but a little difficult to follow. There seemed to be leaps and gaps, something characteristic of some of his later work (as of the work of Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, Meyer Fortes, Marilyn Strathern – but not Evans-Pritchard). At the viva he struck me as rather rambling and I was put off when he suggested that he and Schapera should go off for a drink (S. was my internal examiner, in those days this was allowed) and excluded me. So different from Evans-Pritchard who, after my D.Phil, invited me out to a drink.

I must next have met Jack in Cambridge (where he became William Wyse Professor in 1973), just after I arrived in Cambridge. I remember that he was friendly and encouraging in various ways. He read my Ph.D. thesis on the Gurungs after it had been accepted for publication and made some important suggestions for improvement (in particular including an introductory chapter on demographic theory). He sent me a bundle of his offprints. He encouraged me to attend the 'Friday' seminar, then held in King's College and asked me to present a paper. Most importantly, when I applied for my first teaching job in 1974 in the Department of Social Anthropology, to the post until lately held by Jack's wife Esther, he not only encouraged me to apply, but clearly backed me strongly for the post. (I gathered this from asides during the meeting of the Appointments Committee by Edmund Leach). I was appointed a Lecturer.

In fact, for the rest of his tenure as Professor (to 1983) he was always a wonderful patron and support. He supported me for a Readership, which I got after only six years in the job, and even towards the end for a Professorship (which I only got much later). He encouraged me in every possible way and it is difficult to measure his influence, but here are a few examples.

Whenever we needed equipment for our various projects, he supported the application. On one occasion I remember him pulling out his own cheque book and paying for a piece of equipment and muttering that he would somehow find some money later. In fact it was this 'can do' attitude which I appreciated so much. He was

always optimistic, believing that anything was possible. This was particularly important in relation to the various projects which I started up. He was an inspiration in the main years of the Earls Colne project and put great efforts into helping it flourish.

Jack himself was always intrigued by new technologies and was among the very first to recognize the value of computers and video. For instance, his indexing of the large offprint collection in the department, his computer version of the west African Bagre myths, his purchase of the Human Relations Area Files, all showed this interest. As did the very early recordings he organized of off-air television programmes which gave the Department the basis for its excellent video library. Or again his early realization that we should video-tape sessions with senior, retiring or retired anthropologists. He did this with Meyer Fortes, Audrey Richards and M.N.Srinivas and I have continued over the years to add another 30 or so recordings (including of Jack himself).

The enthusiasm meant that not only did he build up a large department, but early acquired through grants and then the University a technician post. These technicians have been invaluable for our projects, particularly the last two Humphrey Hinton and Paul Caldwell.

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Jack's drive and political skills made the Department of Social Anthropology a really exciting place to be from 1975 to 1983. He prevented feuding and stopping the Department from narrowing down to selected specialisms. He encouraged all forms of anthropology and all areas of the world. Cambridge became the main exporter of good graduates to teach in European universities.

One of the many things I learnt from Jack was how to approach local academic politics. Watching Jack at work through a long day of teaching and administration was an education in itself. He occasionally bullied, took up lost causes, fought unnecessary battles and so on. But on the whole his immense energy and deep cunning (he reminded me of a bear, apparently clumsy, but lethal and quick thinking) and many network ties made him formidable.

He gave me many practical hints. Don't waste too much time on lectures. Don't waste time going up to London committees. Don't waste time on formality – a quick note on the back of an envelope will usually serve the trick. Don't be seduced by the idea of think-tanks. If one has ideas they will come out in any setting and teaching is an encouragement to creativity. Don't waste time on administration, but try to achieve the maximum amount with the minimal effort. Be courteous and encouraging to assistant staff, secretaries and others, and make them feel valued. And many more bits and pieces which have now become second nature (including the trick of relaxing or even slightly dozing through seminars with a hand over the eyes, without giving offence). Through him and in that period I learnt how the University and Department worked (as far as one can), which has since stood me in great stead.

Towards the end of his Professorship he became somewhat irascible and frustrated with the constant drain of being such an active Head of Department, but

was uncertain how to offload this burden. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that he knew the system so well and was reluctant to delegate. So from time to time he would fly into a rage and threaten, or actually, resign. But he came back.

These up-sets worried me and I spent quite a lot of energy in his last three years trying to help, acting as Head of Department, taking over duties and so on. This was a drain but I owed him so much. My feeling of debt is reflected a little in the considerable amount of effort I put into organizing a large farewell party for him, held in his garden and house at 8, Adam's Road. This was a large rambling house with a huge garden which reflected his personality and where Sarah and I had been to so many wonderful parties, where many colleagues and friends from other Departments were to be found. He was a great magnet a life force who, like Peter Laslett (q.v.) burnt brightly on the Cambridge scene.

Intellectually, also, his work and conversations with him had an enormously enlivening effect. Part of his breadth of vision arose from the fact that he was interested in and encouraging of inter-disciplinary work with many disciplines. He had read English as an undergraduate, but fortunately for me a particular interest he had was in history and its relationship to anthropology. So we discussed themes and overlaps, in particular in relation to the history of European kinship and marriage, about which were both writing in those years. Much of his work was set in a long historical time frame, often covering thousands of years. He was practising an early form of global history and maintaining the honourable tradition in anthropology of Kroeber and others in looking at long sweeps of civilizations.

Another stimulation was Jack's interest in technology and material life. Not only was he interested in the practicalities of computers and machines, but he again maintained an earlier (and somewhat unfashionable) anthropological tradition in being interested in material technologies. Thus he wrote books and articles exploring technologies of production, destruction and communication and their effects. This was all the more suggestive because it was broadly comparative, always coming back to the basic contrast which informed his work, that is the difference between the post-Neolithic civilizations of Eur-Asia, and the pre-Neolithic technologies of sub-Saharan Africa.

I am sure that my own later interest in technologies, agricultural, medical, productive (see *Glass, Tea*) was also in this tradition, as were lectures I give on visual technologies, technology and transformation etc. Jack's books on 'Cooking', 'Flowers' etc. explored the fascinating relations between culture and material life which also increasingly interested me.

So a whole set of areas of interest overlapped, demography, kinship, communication and technology. And the idea of speculating at a broadly historical and comparative level, taking India, China, Europe and Africa all as grist to the mill, was a constant inspiration. Listening to Jack at seminars, talking to him and reading his stream of works was a constant source of new ideas and themes to pursue. He was constantly suggesting new links, expanding the borders of what anthropology might be. And this was based on a large library and much travel and experience.

Of course I did not always agree with his conclusions. I remember in an early seminar presentation to the Friday seminar that I attacked Jack's work on kinship, and particularly his apparent material determinism in the 'hoe and plough' thesis. He replied to this robustly, denying my interpretation, though I was not convinced. After he retired he wrote a number of books and articles which rejected some of his earlier work, attacked the work of John Hajnal, the Cambridge Group and (always tactfully and implicitly) myself. The new theme of his work was that basically all Eur-Asian civilizations, from Japan to Ireland, were structurally similar, their kinship, demography and social organizations little different, at least if compared to sub-Saharan Africa, which really *was* different. I found this later work, particularly the *East in the West*, less convincing than the earlier work. But it was always challenging and made one think.

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Jack was enormously productive. By the time he retired (at about 64) he had published about ten books and many articles. In the 18 years since he has retired he has published perhaps another ten. This set me a target, something to exceed in friendly competition and from time to time I tally up our scores. His energy and productivity (including much time lecturing and travelling) are also an inspiration.

In particular I was interested in how he managed to write so much, and to bring together so many diverse ideas. I picked up various hints. He seemed to be working in parallel on half a dozen books or articles at once. If one slowed down, he switched to another. Furthermore, he was always observing and writing, on journeys, in meetings, even in the shortest period. The blight of busy people is that they have only small bits of time and are tempted to put off producing something worthwhile because of distractions or feeling that they will be interrupted. This did not affect him. Great self-discipline and concentration as well as enormous energy lay behind this. Also he wrote fast and did not get blocks. One aid to this was to write as if filling in a jig-saw puzzle or mosaic. At first he would write a few scraps of ideas on a sheet of paper and have it typed. Then he would add in a few more sentences. So a book would be built up as if it were a Lego construction.

This made for great creativity and freeing of the mind in order to make connections. The fact that Jack was constantly exploring new subjects, and then darting back to old ones, always based on deep fieldwork in West Africa and a constant low-key ethnography wherever he went, made his writing very rich. One learnt alongside him and new worlds were opened up.

Whereas Jack's lecturing and speaking style is somewhat awkward, pausing in the middle of sentences, going back, long 'oh' and 'ah' pauses, his writing is very clear and easy to follow and in some of his books very good. In some of the later books there is a sense of rush. We are presented with rough early drafts.

On the other hand there was a certain core to all his work which gives it consistency. This is the question, not dissimilar to the one that obsesses me, as to why Eur-Asia had developed through the Neolithic and post-Neolithic revolutions of many kinds, while Africa had not done so. Jack is a materialist, yet not a Marxist, interested in myth and communication, but not a structuralist. He was no faddist and because of

his interests in his later years more famous perhaps in France than in England. So, after retirement to a certain extent he went out of fashion, at least among British anthropologists. But his reputation in neighbouring disciplines, particularly history and literary studies, was greater than most.

He is a big man in every sense. Although he did not earn the plaudits and gongs of Edmund Leach – no knighthood, few medals and not all the distinguished lectures – but to my mind he was a better ethnographer and a more fruitful and interesting anthropologist. Like the others by whom I have been influenced, Laslett, Thomas, Gellner, he is a major figure in twentieth thought. Perhaps not among the immortals like Evans-Pritchard or Maitland, but great nevertheless. And certainly someone who deeply shaped my interests, life and career. A good friend and patron, as he is to many.