

# GUSTAV JAHODA

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1985

by

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Born in Vienna, Gustav Jahoda arrived in the UK during the Second World War from France as a refugee. After the war he graduated from Birkbeck College London and obtained lectureships in psychology at the University of Manchester, the University College of the Gold Coast in Ghana and the University of Glasgow. In 1964 he became the founding Professor of the Department of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. As a cross-cultural and a cultural psychologist he studied the development of mental processes and solutions to practical problems in children and young adults in Ghana, Scotland and European countries. Jahoda made transdisciplinary theoretical contributions in human and social sciences which he formulated in numerous books and articles, for example, in *Psychology and Anthropology* (1982), *Crossroads Between Culture and Mind* (1992) and *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture* (1999).



GUSTAV JAHODA

## Life

Gustav Jahoda was born in Vienna. He grew up in a turbulent period and his worldview was strongly influenced by the hunger and poverty he witnessed on the streets of Vienna during the economic collapse of the 1920s. However, he enjoyed his school education and recalled being taught mathematics at his Gymnasium by a Nobel Prize Winner. He discovered his Jewish background when the authorities expelled him from his secondary school with the rise of Fascism. Subsequently, he spent a year at school in Paris, where he lived with his aunt and uncle. Gustav recalled having had to learn French very quickly as he was initially bullied as a foreign pupil with no knowledge of the language. Later, after the Anschluss, the family moved to Paris just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Gustav enrolled in a civil engineering course. Once again, his studies were interrupted, this time by the outbreak of the war. He joined the French army and when the French front collapsed he escaped to the UK by leaving his unit and reaching St Nazaire, where the last of the British Expeditionary forces were being evacuated. Gustav was fortunate to choose to embark on the *Royal Ulsterman* and not the *Lancastria*, which was sunk with the largest single-ship loss of life in British maritime history. His parents and his younger brother made their way separately to New York and Gustav lost contact with them until after the war.<sup>1</sup>

Gustav arrived in Britain as a refugee and was always grateful for the tolerance and openness he met. He spoke no English and his grasp of the vernacular came from his time in the Pioneer Corps, the only unit of the British army prepared to admit enemy aliens. The Corps carried out various construction tasks under the supervision of the Royal Engineers, perhaps not taxing his civil engineering skills. However, he was later invalided out of the British army after suffering an extremely serious ankle break when training for D-Day. His subsequent war work was carried out under the auspices of the Official Secrets Act, which he steadfastly refused to discuss. When he was asked one final time, before he died, he did reveal that the work had been 'rather boring'.

After the war he studied part-time at Birkbeck College London, whilst working as a photographer and conjurer to finance his studies. When he graduated he obtained lectureships at the University of Manchester, the University College of the Gold Coast (Ghana), and the University of Glasgow. In 1964 he became the founding Professor of the newly established Department of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.

<sup>1</sup> For further details of Gustav Jahoda's life and work see P. R. Dasen and G. Vermes, 'In memoriam: Gustav Jahoda', *Alterstice – Revue Internationale De La Recherche Interculturelle*, 6 (2) (2017), 7–11; J. Deregowski, 'In memoriam. Gustav Jahoda: a life', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 48 (2017), 455–60; I. Marková (ed.), 'Special issue: across culture, mind and history', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018).

Gustav's experience in Ghana, where he had a lectureship in sociology, profoundly influenced his thinking and the approach to his work. He combined a scholarly interest in theory with a hands-on practical interest in applying research methods in a real-world context. For example, in Ghana children's names reflected the weekday of their birth, which were seen as having different characteristics. It was rumoured that the Ghanaian politician Nkrumah, who then became the President of Ghana, changed his name to Kwame, which means Friday, as it was associated with being auspicious. Monday's child was supposed to be placid while the child born on a Wednesday was likely to be aggressive. Gustav explored these beliefs by painstaking scrutiny of Juvenile Court Records. He discovered that children born on Mondays were significantly under-represented as offenders while Wednesday's children were significantly over-represented in offences against the person. Gustav saw this as early empirical evidence for labelling, while the traditionalists viewed it as vindication of the truth of the name values! Gustav and his economist friend Walter Birmingham carried out a very early electoral poll for the first election in the Gold Coast that brought Nkrumah to power. They predicted the result with great accuracy, leading to suggestions of witchcraft. Gustav spoke of the sampling having been very carefully carried out. People were polled at their homes and in private settings and Gustav saw that public utterances did not always reflect voting behaviour.

In the early 1960s Gustav took part in the activities of European social psychologists to establish their own vision of the discipline, and he was one of the founders of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP). He was a member of the first Planning Committee, together with Serge Moscovici, Henri Tajfel, Mauk Mulder and Jozef Nuttin. He built collaborations with psychologists across Europe and offered a fresh perspective which challenged some of the dominant views from North America. Perhaps what marked him out was the breadth of his knowledge and interests; he was a polymath with an extraordinary ability to retain information. In his interview with Sandra Schruijer in 2012 he observed that,<sup>2</sup> 'although EAESP has done much for the emancipation of social psychology in Europe and the introduction of European thinking into the USA, over time it became to resemble American-style social psychology more and more'.<sup>3</sup> Schruijer comments:

Reflecting on the origins of EAESP and his role in it he said that although he was enthusiastic about the whole endeavor, he had some skepticisms as he saw himself more as a cultural psychologist and as a listener... the Americans wanted to convince the Europeans that social psychology should be experimental. "There was a wish to

<sup>2</sup> Y. H. Poortinga and S. G. L. Schruijer, 'Gustav Jahoda: the art and science of constructive scepticism', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 368–81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 376.



see social psychology as a science just like physics". Experimentation was associated with science. Gustav had his reservations. "There is an inverse relationship between the rigor of an experimental method and the relevance to real life phenomena".

In 1972, the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology was founded in Hong Kong and Gustav served as its first full-term president. In 1988 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, at that time into the section of Social Studies. Later on, when the British Academy diversified, he joined the Anthropology as well as Psychology sections. In 1993 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

After he retired in 1985, Gustav spoke of his move from the field to the library. He continued to dedicate himself to learning and writing and publishing his research. Most of his work concerned the history of psychology. However, he maintained a keen interest in recent developments. In addition to reassessment of historical thinkers, he often identified themes or concepts with which those thinkers had grappled, and which continue to resonate in contemporary debates. Gustav himself sought to explore the origins of some psychological concepts that had been taken for granted. For example, he thoroughly explored the evolution of the term 'empathy' which, in the eighteenth century, was effectively a synonym of 'sympathy'.

Those who knew him might have been surprised to learn that he greatly missed the contact with students in his later years. He took genuine pleasure in the successes and achievements of colleagues or students. Though keen to encourage students' original thinking, he had no hesitation in taking issue with established figures when he believed their contentions were unsound. While his arguments were carefully constructed and telling, his criticisms were never personal.

Gustav's zest for knowledge and driven engagement with the world of ideas lasted until his final weeks and days. Up to the end of his last year he engaged with new ideas and developments in science, art and politics, and he was captivated by the measurement of gravitational waves. He continued publishing and planned new subjects for papers, making the trip by train to his office at the University of Strathclyde three days a week until his 94<sup>th</sup> year. He refused medical treatment when he realised that he faced a high level of dependence, discomfort and indignity, with the prospect only of further physical deterioration, and when his scope for active and independent intellectual functioning was going to drastically reduce or disappear.

In his last few weeks, when the members of his family asked him what academic endeavours he was most proud of, he said that it was his work to challenge lazy assumptions about cultural superiority.

‘In order to become a really good social psychologist,  
I ought to experience life in a greatly different culture’

Gustav Jahoda belonged to the generation of social scientists who had an unprecedented influence on the growth of human and social sciences after the Second World War. The horrors of Nazism and Communism led to vast migrations of scholars and scientists from their native lands to other European countries and to the United States. Having had their personal experiences of political and cultural distress, migrants within Europe developed their individual academic and practical styles by perpetuating the heritage of European philosophy, and of human and social sciences, in their new homes. Their migration had a profound effect on the broadly based intellectual cultivation of these disciplines, among them social psychology. As migrants, they had to struggle to be accepted, to establish themselves, and to make careers in their new countries. Some of the scholars who made highly significant contributions to the development of European social psychology after the war included Marie Jahoda, Henri Tajfel, Serge Moscovici, Hilde Himmelweit, Rudolf Schaffer and, of course, Gustav Jahoda.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning of his career, Jahoda’s scholarly work was very broadly based, crossing several human and social sciences, such as social and developmental psychology, anthropology, history, sociology and cultural studies. He was convinced that the human mind must be conceived in and through interdependent relations between humans and their socio-cultural and historical environments, in which they develop knowledge in transforming their ideas and concepts. In one of his last papers, entitled ‘Seventy years of social psychology: a cultural and personal critique’, Jahoda reflected on the advancement of social psychology after the war.<sup>5</sup> Believing that through new experimental developments, social psychology ‘was really becoming scientific!’, he had listened to a scholar from New Zealand, Ernest Beaglehole, who carried out anthropological and psychological research in the Pacific. Gustav Jahoda recalled: ‘He advised me that in order to become a really good social psychologist, I ought to experience life in a greatly different culture.’

Cross-cultural psychology was becoming a new and stimulating field of study, and Gustav set off with his family to the Gold Coast, now Ghana, in West Africa. His aim was to replicate there the social psychological experiments that the well-known American social psychologist Theodore Newcomb had described to him. Thus, during

<sup>4</sup>I. Marková and A. Jahoda, ‘Across culture, mind and history’, *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 266–81.

<sup>5</sup>G. Jahoda, ‘Seventy years of social psychology: a cultural and personal critique’, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 4 (2016), 364–80.

the years that followed, Jahoda carried out wide-ranging studies in Africa. These included research on the relation of Ashanti names and personality, geometrical illusions and environment, topological and Euclidean spatial features noted by children, factors influencing orientation errors in reproduction of Kohs-type figures, among others. The research and experience of living in Africa was deeply revealing, because Jahoda failed to obtain results similar to those found in the USA. Just like some other researchers, he concluded that the data obtained from US college students in experiments on social cognition, influence, conformity, group dynamics and other phenomena were not generally applicable across diverse populations internationally.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that children and young adults in African countries responded to Western experimental tasks differently than Westerners was often viewed by researchers as an inability by Africans to think abstractly. Jahoda insisted, however, that those researchers who wrote about the concrete and rigid mental capacities of Africans were not aware of their own limitations in thinking by using tests designed for Western cultures and ‘comparing’ results with those in African cultures. Tests do not operate in a vacuum and they have different meanings for people in different cultures. Not only did Western psychologists ignore the role of the environment in which individuals lived, but they also disregarded knowledge of neighbouring disciplines such as developmental psychology, history, anthropology and sociology. Above all, Jahoda was strongly influenced by anthropology that was ‘hardly ever mentioned in social psychology texts’. In his classic book, *Psychology and Anthropology*, he traced the origins of culture-related psychology and ideas about the uniqueness of culture and mind.<sup>7</sup> He drew attention to the historical perspective that showed that these two disciplines, psychology and anthropology, emerged from common roots. They are both concerned with a number of fundamental topics such as personality, socialisation, social behaviour, systems of explanation and reasoning, classification and symbolism. Jahoda documented his understanding of the interface between psychology and anthropology by providing concrete examples of social activities such as customs, myths and the use of symbols. Given the complexity and richness of the phenomena studied from psychological and anthropological perspectives, Gustav was particularly scrupulous in approaching them with a clear elaboration of the conceptual and methodological strengths and limitations of each discipline.

Jahoda was a ferocious critic of the narrowly conceived experimental social psychology as it was established in the United States after the Second World War and transported to Europe. This kind of psychology fragmented humans into elements and studied their behaviour in terms of dependent and independent variables, ignoring

<sup>6</sup>Marková and Jahoda, ‘Across culture, mind and history’.

<sup>7</sup>G. Jahoda, *Psychology and Anthropology: a Psychological Perspective* (London: 1982).

their dynamic nature and their environment. Jahoda emphasised that, without paying attention to the cultural and historical contexts of social conduct, the findings of experimental social psychologists reflect no more than contemporary fashions and current social norms. They are unlikely to reveal universal social processes and, instead, they masquerade the study of nature by presenting it as the study of social processes.<sup>8</sup> Jahoda was well aware that his critiques were not new, and that previous generations of scholars over many decades had expressed views similar to his own. However, naïve presuppositions of the static and universalistic features of humans that allegedly conformed to ‘scientific’ assumptions were resistant to questions about their truthfulness and, therefore, to any possibility of change.

### Children’s thinking is manifold and heterogeneous: Gustav Jahoda versus Jean Piaget

After his return from Africa in 1956, Jahoda took up a lecturing position at the University of Glasgow. Child psychology was one of his foremost interests, and he was particularly attentive to the study of practical problems and culture-related topics. Among the first empirical studies he undertook after his return was research on children’s ideas about nationality. These studies were inspired by research of the renowned Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget, with whom Jahoda disagreed—but whom he admired.

Jahoda’s disagreement with Piaget became particularly apparent in his analysis of Piaget’s research on children’s understanding of Swiss nationality. Specifically, after the war, national stereotypes were extensively studied and in this context Piaget and Weil carried out a study into children’s ideas about their homeland.<sup>9</sup> They found that children up to the age 10–11 did not understand class inclusion, that is, they did not comprehend that someone could be at the same time both Swiss and Genevan.

With his methodological rigour and ingenuity, Jahoda showed in his own study that the abstract concept of ‘nationality’ as a logical class, with its ill-defined boundaries, was likely to be responsible for the child’s errors and confusions. Jahoda showed that young children could make category inclusions if they were familiar with the concepts in question, and if they were aware of class boundaries between them. For example, very young children could understand that someone could be at the same

<sup>8</sup> M. Billig, ‘Those who only know of social psychology know not social psychology: a tribute to Gustav Jahoda’s historical approach’, *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 282–93.

<sup>9</sup> J. Piaget and A.-M. Weil, ‘The development in children of the idea of the homeland and relations with other countries’, *International Social Science Bulletin*, 3 (1951), 561–78.



time a schoolboy, a pedestrian, a human being, a son; and that something could be both a leek and vegetable.

Piaget studied a variety of forms of children's thinking such as the acquisition of causality, religion, science and morality, among others. Jahoda highly regarded Piaget's ingenuity and novel ways of studying child development. Piaget used the method of free and in-depth conversations to explore children's thinking, which was also used by anthropologists in explorations of interactions between humans and their cultural contexts. Nevertheless, there were fundamental differences between the theoretical presuppositions of Piaget and Jahoda. Piaget's universalistic approach to child rationality and genetic epistemology affected his observations and experiments that he and his teams carried out first in Neuchâtel and then in Geneva. His studies involved children from relatively homogeneous environments of middle-class Swiss families. The study of biology, philosophy and logic were leading disciplines on the basis of which Piaget constructed his coherent theoretical system. The beliefs in autonomy and freedom of the individual gave direction to Piaget's ideas of the ontogenetic and universal development of children's judgement and rationality.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, Jahoda's intellectual background, his life in Austria, France and the UK, and in particular his experience in Africa, orientated him towards conceiving the child's thinking as heterogeneous, based not only on cognitive capacities but also as being interdependent with the child's social experience in family, peers and the life in community. Therefore, Piaget's universalistic approach to the child's cognition was totally at odds with Jahoda's presuppositions concerning child development. Piaget's epistemology presupposed that mental maturation of the child was uniform across age and culture. Jahoda particularly disagreed with Piaget's assumption that logico-mathematical operations were applicable to all kinds of children's thinking.

Jahoda's numerous and diverse cross-cultural experimental results during the 1950s and 1980s showed that a child's thinking takes manifold and heterogeneous forms and that it cannot be viewed as a mental capacity developing in a rigid and pre-established order. He abundantly explored children's ideas about nationality, economic institutions, markets and many other topics that influenced the development of their thought.<sup>11</sup> Children in different 'cultures' learn different things and acquire

<sup>10</sup> A.-N. Perret-Clermont, 'Epilogue: Piaget, his elders and his peers', in A.-N. Perret-Clermont and J.-M. Barrelet (eds.), *Jean Piaget and Neuchâtel* (Hove and New York, 2008), pp. 202–31.

<sup>11</sup> Among many studies of these topics, for example: G. Jahoda, 'Sex differences in preferences for shapes: a cross-cultural replication', *British Journal of Psychology*, 47 (1956), 126–32; G. Jahoda, 'Children's concepts of time and history', *Educational Review*, 15 (1963), 87–104; G. Jahoda, 'The construction of economic reality by some Glaswegian children', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 9 (1979), 115–27; G. Jahoda, 'Development of Scottish children's ideas and attitudes about other countries', *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 58 (1962), 91–108; G. Jahoda, 'The development of children's ideas about country and nationality. Part I: a conceptual framework', *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 33

different kinds of experience which they apply in their relevant contexts. Jahoda's studies of children in Ghana, Scotland, and other European countries provided him with knowledge of the ways they acquire social concepts, that is concepts they learn about in their daily experience from parents, peers, or other people, rather than in formal schooling. These concepts include economics, money, banks, time and history, alcohol, national symbols, myth and magic.

In a pioneering study for the Scottish Home and Health Department in the early 1970s, Jahoda was faced with the challenge of evaluating young children's recognition of and attitude to the effects of alcohol. Innovative ideas included hiring a young actor to depict various states of inebriation on film. Jahoda's findings that children at the age of six years understand what it is to be drunk and that it is something negative led in Scotland to a recommendation, radical at the time, that primary school children should be taught about alcoholism.<sup>12</sup>

The novel feature of his studies was Jahoda's holistic perspective with respect to the child's understandings of concepts and phenomena in daily life. For example, Jahoda's research into socio-economic understandings of activities in shops and banks showed that it was necessary to find out whether the child comprehended basic principles of operations carried out in such establishments. Concerning shops, it was important to consider the child's knowledge of interpersonal relations—for example, between customer and shop, between shop and shop assistants and between shop and factory.<sup>13</sup> Equally, the understanding of functioning of the bank was dependent on the child's knowledge of concepts such as 'profit', 'loan', or 'interest'. The child obtains such knowledge mainly in family and in daily encounters. Different spheres of social thinking involve different kinds of practical knowledge and a range of interpersonal relations.<sup>14</sup> Jahoda was convinced that social psychology as a developmental

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(1963), 47–60; G. Jahoda, 'The development of children's ideas about country and nationality. Part II: national symbols and themes', *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 33 (1963), 143–53.

<sup>12</sup> G. Jahoda and J. Cramond, *Children and Alcohol* (London, 1972); G. Jahoda, J. B. Davis and S. Tagg, 'Parents' alcohol consumption and children's knowledge of drinks and usage pattern', *British Journal of Addiction*, 75 (1980), 297–303.

<sup>13</sup> I. Marková and J. C. Jesuino, 'Social psychology as a developmental discipline in the dynamics of practical life: Gustav Jahoda's pioneering studies on children's social thinking', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 343–57.

<sup>14</sup> Jahoda, 'The construction of economic reality by some Glaswegian children'; G. Jahoda, 'The development of thinking about economic institutions: the bank', *Cahiers De Psychologie Cognitive*, 1 (1981), 55–73; G. Jahoda, 'The development of thinking about socio-economic systems', in H. Tajfel, C. Fraser and J. M. F. Jaspars (eds.), *The Social Dimension*, vol. 1: *European Developments in Social Psychology* (Cambridge and Paris, 1984), pp. 69–88; G. Jahoda, 'Levels of social and logico-mathematical thinking: their nature and interrelations', in W. Doise and A. Palmonari (eds.), *Social Interaction in Individual Development* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 173–8.

discipline must study the dynamics of practical life. Numerous examples of his research illustrate this point. For example, children in Zimbabwe and in Scotland had different kinds of experience concerning the socio-economic concept of 'profit'. While Scottish children below the age of 10 had no idea how to respond to the question about profit, children in Zimbabwe, who often helped their mothers in the market, could easily provide answers to such questions.<sup>15</sup>

### From cross-cultural to cultural psychology

After the Second World War anthropologists and psychologists, more than ever before, were keen to explore similarities and differences of human psyche across the globe and therefore interest in cross-cultural and comparative studies, including Piagetian studies,<sup>16</sup> was rapidly growing. Yet despite its fast development and diversification, Jahoda emphasised that some dominant topics of this newly flourishing field showed a considerable continuity with, and repetition of, well-known historical themes that had been explored over the past two or three centuries. His cultural-historical sensitivity brought attention to the main and mutually opposing epistemological presuppositions within cross-cultural and cultural studies that were built into diverse views of human nature throughout its long past.<sup>17</sup>

First, there was an epistemological presupposition of continuity in the development of human species. This was implied by Darwin's assumption that all species could be placed on an upward continuum and that, as pre-humans gradually acquired reason and language, they progressed to humans.<sup>18</sup> Jahoda and Krewer were critical of the idea which implied that cultures were at different stages of development and that they gradually achieved higher intellectual powers:

The dominant model of man as a natural creature endowed with reason corresponds in many ways to the basic model of cross-cultural psychology. From this perspective human diversity was conceptualised as a variation on the same theme, and it was this

<sup>15</sup>G. Jahoda, 'European "lag" in the development of an economic concept: a study in Zimbabwe', *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 1 (1983), 113–20.

<sup>16</sup>P. R. Dasen, 'Cross-cultural Piagetian research: a summary', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 3 (1972), 23–40; P. R. Dasen and A. Heron, 'Cross-cultural tests of Piaget's theory', in H. C. Triandis and A. Heron (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 4: *Developmental Psychology* (Boston, MA, 1981), pp. 295–342.

<sup>17</sup>G. Jahoda and B. Krewer, 'History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology', in J. Berry, Y. H. Poortinga, and J. Pandey (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2nd edn, vol. 1: *Theory and Method* (Boston, MA, 1997), pp. 1–42.

<sup>18</sup>T. Ingold, 'Beyond biology and culture: the meaning of evolution in a relational world', *Social Anthropology*, 12 (2004), 209–21; A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: 1936).

theme that constituted the focus of interest. Evidence of how to up-to-date such an approach is ... plea to peel the onion called culture.<sup>19</sup>

This is the model of Enlightenment according to which the human being is a composite of levels, each superimposed upon those beneath it and underpinning those above it. As one analyses humans, 'one peels off layers after layer' and finds the underlying structural and functional organisation.<sup>20</sup> Underneath psychological layers one finds biological foundations such as anatomical, physiological and neurological, of the human edifice.<sup>21</sup>

This edifice of human life had to be unravelled by the scientific quest to understand both nature and human nature by assuming a determinism governed by natural laws. It was the attempt to transfer the successful Newtonian model from physics to human affairs that led to a machine-like, mechanical understanding of human beings as prototypically realised in La Mettrie's (1748) *L'homme machine*.<sup>22</sup>

Among the ancestors of cross-cultural psychology Jahoda and Krewer included Francis Galton, William Halse Rivers, Richard Thurnwald and Frederik Bartlett. These scholars were involved in invaluable empirical and/or theoretical work across cultures.

When the newly developing field of cross-cultural psychology quickly diversified after the war, it followed the methodological strategy of mainstream psychology, focusing on inductive data collection, measurements and statistical analyses. Its approach was basically ahistorical, aiming at the discovery of universals. Jahoda and Krewer maintained that cross-cultural psychology united itself by its goal to internationalise the empirical basis of psychology by studying similarities and differences among citizens in different parts of the globe.<sup>23</sup> It defined itself above all by its methodology, rather than by epistemological, theoretical or content-bound concerns. They quoted from John Berry who explicitly expressed the priority of methodology in cross-cultural studies: 'It is our methodology that we must turn to in order to seek our identity as a discipline.'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jahoda and Krewer, 'History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology', pp. 14–15.

<sup>20</sup> Y. H. Poortinga, F. J. R. Van de Vijver, R. C. Joe and J. M. H. Van de Koppel, 'Peeling the onion called culture', in C. Kagitcibasi (ed.), *Growth and Progress in Cross-cultural Psychology* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 22–34.

<sup>21</sup> C. Geertz, 'The impact of the concept of culture on the concept of man', in E. Hammer and W. Simmons (eds.), *Man Makes Sense* (Boston, 1970), pp. 44–65.

<sup>22</sup> Jahoda and Krewer, 'History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology', p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>24</sup> J. W. Berry, 'Introduction to methodology', in H. C. Triandis and J. W. Berry (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1980), pp. 1–28.

The opposite kind of epistemological presuppositions in relation to cultural studies stemmed from socio-historical perspectives,<sup>25</sup> and Jahoda and Krewer viewed these as indicators for the emergence of cultural psychology. These perspectives had their origin in the Renaissance, showing a profound effect of the diversification of knowledge in various spheres of scientific and artistic concerns, as well as in daily life. Within these perspectives, social knowledge proved to be eminently relevant to the study of the human mind and culture as the dynamic and ever-changing processes of human history. The emphasis on language and communication became part of this process. Humanity could not be understood solely as constituted by natural dispositions but, equally important, as being shaped and as self-created in history and social development. Predecessors of cultural psychology included Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm Humboldt, Moritz Lazarus, Hermann Steinthal and Wilhelm Wundt, among others. Their ideas were part of the social, political and economic climate, in particular in Germany and in surrounding Central European countries, where debates for and against the formation of modern nations took place. Studies of their languages, communities and their histories, as well as of the collective spirit of people, were widely discussed.<sup>26</sup> As Jahoda argued, the beginnings of social anthropology, social psychology and ethnology were intermingled.<sup>27</sup> Complex mental processes and products of communities required a historical and comparative analysis. That was possible only in and through anthropology and psychology conceived as a historical-comparative study and a diachronic study of languages, myths and customs.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1990s debates at the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology concerning diversity within cross-cultural psychology took place,<sup>29</sup> and the socio-cultural tradition obtained the new title of ‘cultural psychology’. Whilst ‘cultural psychology’ was not a unitary domain, its diverse sub-branches shared certain epistemological presuppositions about the human mind and its socio-cultural development.

Later in his life, Jahoda conceded that, just like many others, he started his career as a cross-cultural psychologist. Empirical research was a vital component of his cross-cultural commitments. At the same time he was convinced that the manipulation

<sup>25</sup> Jahoda and Krewer, ‘History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology’.

<sup>26</sup> For example, R. Diriwächter, ‘Völkerpsychologie’, in J. Valsiner (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology* (New York and Oxford, 2012), pp. 43–57; Jahoda, *Psychology and Anthropology: a Psychological Perspective*; G. Jahoda, *A History of Social Psychology: from the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2007); E. Klautke, ‘The mind of the nation: the debate about Völkerpsychologie, 1851–1900’, *Central Europe*, 8 (2010), 1–19.

<sup>27</sup> Jahoda, *Psychology and Anthropology: a Psychological Perspective*.

<sup>28</sup> I. Marková, *The Dialogical Mind: Common Sense and Ethics* (Cambridge, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Jahoda and Krewer, ‘History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology’, p. 1



of independent variables does not exert an effect on the development of knowledge in any simple and direct manner. The manipulation of variables cannot adequately explain complex processes of socialisation and social interactions.<sup>30</sup> Instead, these processes ‘take place within an overarching cultural framework, and to ignore this is to be guilty of gross oversimplification’.<sup>31</sup> He critically referred to his own earlier work that was ‘misguided’ by what he called a less extreme model of simplistic cross-cultural research. However, he did not deny the valuable work that has been carried out within that tradition, but emphasised its limitations.

Gradually, he started to refer to his conversion from a ‘merely “cross-cultural” to a wider “cultural” psychologist’, often referring to the elusive concepts of culture.<sup>32</sup> For a great connoisseur of German cultural scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Johann Herbart and Wilhelm Wundt, among others, Jahoda’s move was not surprising. Moreover, whilst the cultural tradition had a rich spectrum of ancestors from Vico to Wundt, the discovery of the socio-cultural approach of Soviet psychologists Vygotsky and Luria was for Jahoda a new encounter, brought to his attention by Michael Cole.<sup>33</sup>

Jahoda acknowledged that cultural psychology made a radical break from mainstream experimental psychology and from its epistemological basis, because the kind of focus it followed could not be explored in and through ahistorical experiments. It did not mean that cultural psychology would abandon the empirical basis, but it followed a different path.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Jahoda concluded that the two concepts of culture, ‘those of cross-cultural versus cultural psychologists, are so divergent that it is hard to see how they could be reconciled’.<sup>35</sup> However, despite the difficulty to reconcile their differences, Jahoda viewed the work of cross-cultural and cultural psychologists as complementary.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> G. Jahoda, ‘The colour of a chameleon: perspectives of concepts of culture’, *Cultural Dynamics*, 6 (1993), 277–87.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 281

<sup>33</sup> M. Cole, *Cultural Psychology: a Once and Future Discipline* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Jahoda, ‘The colour of a chameleon’, 281

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 282

<sup>36</sup> For more details about this division see W. J. Lonner and J. Adamopoulos, ‘Culture as antecedent to behavior’, in J. Berry, Y. H. Poortinga, and J. Pandey (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2nd edn, vol. 1: *Theory and Method* (Boston, 1997), pp. 43–83.

## Culture, Mind and History

Throughout his broadly conceived scholarship, Jahoda's oeuvre was dominated by his focus on the interdependence between Culture, Mind and History. In his classic book *Crossroads between Culture and Mind* he compared these three concepts with another triad, that of Biology, Race and Mind.<sup>37</sup> He suggested that throughout the history of humankind, these two triads of concepts defined two fundamental themes, closely related to one another as they kept persistently returning: first, 'what are the boundaries between the human and the non-human?'; and second, 'how do we define the differences between 'us' and 'others'?' These themes have not only a theoretical significance but also, above all, they determine relations and interactions among humans. These themes preoccupied Jahoda throughout all his work, because they implied the existence of racist attitudes which, from his early career, he intensely attacked.

First, Jahoda repeatedly posed the question: 'what does it mean to be a human being?' On the one hand, humans have biologically determined features that are not part of culture, such as giving birth, dying, breathing, and so on. These biological features humans share with non-humans. However, humans create themselves in history, through the interdependent relations between the culture and mind. And yet, already in human pre-history, 'we' and 'they' relations were fundamental to life. The preference for one's own group is very deeply and unconsciously entrenched in the human mind. It is difficult to reflect upon it and it is even less possible to eradicate it. 'We' identify with our group, nation or language, and are ready to distance ourselves from 'others' who are associated with danger, threat and risk, or at least who are not considered as valued beings.

In a number of studies Jahoda persistently analysed the views of racist ethnologists who asserted that non-Europeans, and especially Africans, were biologically incapable of ever functioning at the same intellectual level as Europeans. Racist ethnologists also distinguished between supposedly 'superior' and 'inferior' races within Europe, often on the basis of the shapes of their skulls. Since his initial career Jahoda published studies on political and racist attitudes.<sup>38</sup> His first book, entitled *White Man*,<sup>39</sup> was devoted to this pervasive issue, and was based on his early research in Ghana. Jahoda turned round the commonly studied white people's perceptions of black people and instead explored how white people were perceived by black Ghanaians.

<sup>37</sup> G. Jahoda, *Crossroads between Culture and Mind* (New York, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> G. Jahoda, 'Race differences and race prejudice', *Biology and Human Affairs*, 16 (1951), 138–44; G. Jahoda, 'Political attitudes and judgments of other people', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 49 (1954), 330–4.

<sup>39</sup> G. Jahoda, *White Man: a Study of the Attitudes of Africans to Europeans in Ghana before Independence* (London, 1961).

This book resulted from diaries that he had kept during his work in Ghana, noting images that Africans had of other Europeans and even of himself. Attitudes towards Europeans referred to the past slave trade, missionary activities and to colonial rule. While illiterate villagers were subservient, educated people tended to behave in a more egalitarian manner. However, many Africans expressed the view that they were regarded as subhuman beings and this, Jahoda maintained, was 'one of the most significant findings' of his study. The widespread tendency to differentiate themselves from unwanted 'others' remained Gustav's theme throughout his work. In a historically conceived book, and conceptualised with high originality, *Images of Savages* strove to uncover the 'ancient roots of modern prejudice in Western Culture', in which the 'image of the savage as childlike' goes back a thousand years.<sup>40</sup> These images still manifest themselves as racial prejudices, showing that boundaries between the human and the non-human are still part of contemporary social and political life.

The theme of supposedly 'superior' and 'inferior' races also featured in Jahoda's recurrent analyses of Jean Piaget and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.<sup>41</sup> These culminated in Jahoda's article devoted specifically to Piaget's alleged misinterpretation of Lévy-Bruhl.<sup>42</sup> Jahoda documented that, for Piaget, the work of Lévy-Bruhl was a source of inspiration. Piaget believed that Lévy-Bruhl had proposed 'analogies between the child and the primitive at every step'.<sup>43</sup> Jahoda accentuated that comparison between 'primitives' and children was a common theme in nineteenth-century literature, and that it was even supported by 'scientific' theories of the time. However, Lévy-Bruhl 'never directly compared primitives with children' and indeed he very rarely referred to children; when he did, 'he explicitly objected to such comparisons' which Jahoda verifies by numerous examples.<sup>44</sup> It appears that Piaget's misunderstanding was related to Lévy-Bruhl's terms such as 'participation', 'mystical mentality', 'magical thinking' and 'pre-logical thinking'. As Jahoda observed, due to numerous critiques, later in his life Lévy-Bruhl gave up his term 'pre-logical thinking', which had led to much confusion concerning his proper views.

More generally, Jahoda argued that the denigration of Lévy-Bruhl adopted by many scholars was unwarranted and based on inaccurate simplifications. In paying enormous attention to historical detail and accuracy of reading and the understanding of texts, Jahoda emphasised that Lévy-Bruhl attempted to explain different modes

<sup>40</sup> G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture* (London, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> For details see Marková and Jesuino, 'Social psychology as a developmental discipline in the dynamics of practical life'.

<sup>42</sup> G. Jahoda, 'Piaget and Lévy-Bruhl', *History of Psychology*, 3 (2000), 218–38.

<sup>43</sup> J. Piaget, *The Child's Concept of Physical Causality* (Totowa, NJ, 1972), p. 88.

<sup>44</sup> L. Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive* [How Natives Think], trans. Lilian A. Clare (Princeton, NJ, 1985 [1922]).

of thought due to cultural differences and that this point was crudely misconstrued. He insisted that Lévy-Bruhl's terms 'pre-logical' and 'logical' did not refer to an evolutionary point of view according to which the original 'pre-logical primitives' develop into rational beings. Instead, Lévy-Bruhl adopted the perspective according to which humans lived in different social and cultural environments and their rationalities were expressions of collective representations suited to those environments. Lévy-Bruhl's perspective, therefore, rejected the criterion of a fixed universal rationality and instead proposed multiple rationalities as processes that developed in accordance with the requirements of cultures in which humans live.

Jahoda observed that Lévy-Bruhl's ideas were misunderstood both by scholars adopting the egalitarian ethos of the late nineteenth century as well as by social anthropologists after the Second World War when the concept of cultural differences, of universal rationality, its growth in individuals, societies, and cultures, had been widely discussed. While all scholars attempted to hold the presupposition of the mental unity of mankind, the contents of these debates intermingled the social scientific issues with political agendas arising from the fact that different cultures, languages and minds of others can be understood only within their own idiosyncratic socio-historical situations, rather than universally.

### Gustav Jahoda as a person

Gustav Jahoda was a very modest person, never emphasising his scholarly achievements and he was very uncomfortable with the general habit of academic self-promotion.<sup>45</sup> He had the deepest sense of personal integrity and he was very frank in expressing his views, whether to acclaimed authorities or to his friends and colleagues, paying no attention to personal loyalties. For these characteristics he was both an admired scholar and a formidable opponent in academic controversies. Although we could choose a number of examples of such incidents, let us refer to one. Poortinga remembered that he and his collaborators asked Jahoda to write a foreword for their textbook *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Theory and Applications*.<sup>46</sup> He accepted on condition that he could express his honest opinion. The authors were happy to accept this, but Jahoda's text, while expressing some positive aspects, 'outlined in some detail what he saw as an important shortcoming (basically insufficient attention to culturalist

<sup>45</sup> Billig, 'Those who only know of social psychology know not social psychology'.

<sup>46</sup> Poortinga and Schruijer, 'Gustav Jahoda'; J. W. Berry, Y. H. Poortinga, M. H. Segall and P. R. Dasen, *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2002).

approaches).<sup>47</sup> As a result, the authors wondered whether they should ask him for a preface in the second edition.

Fortunately, in this case principles of open communication in science trumped the egos of the authors, but it is telling that there was a discussion, even after a balanced argument with more favorable than unfavorable comments.<sup>48</sup>

Gustav's energy and working spirit were relentless. Sandra Schruijer recalls her discussion with him,<sup>49</sup> seven years after he published his book on the history of social psychology.<sup>50</sup> One of the reviewers was hoping for a volume 2, probably not being aware that Gustav was 86 years old when the book was published. Sandra Schruijer refers to a mail with Gustav, who was then 92: 'I'm lacking in energy these days. What little I have is usually confined to work, which I'm determined to continue as long as I can.' But a few lines later he writes 'It occurred to me that we might discuss the possibility of some joint work, since we have similar interests – what do you think of that?'

### Gustav Jahoda's legacy

Gustav Jahoda's long life and work brings to focus an exemplary case of a scholar who created and re-created his theories and empirical research in and through interdependent relations with the socio-cultural and political environments in which he lived. Conditions during and after the war, optimism in the possibility of scientific achievements of psychology, in the study of the human mind across the globe, guided his talent and energy 'to become a really good social psychologist', and 'to experience life in a greatly different culture'. At the same time he implicitly adopted presuppositions that guided research in social psychology in the postwar period. These implicit presuppositions became explicitly formulated and became the source of problems when Jahoda realised that social psychology was trapped in the search for universals using ahistorical and mechanistic approaches in its struggle to imitate natural sciences. For the rest of his academic career he faced the problem of how to reconcile his transdisciplinary perspective, enabling him to explore the human mind and culture, with his meticulous search for clarity of concepts and methods. We see again and again Jahoda's attention to highly sensitive issues concerning the views of anthropologists and psychologists with respect to the unity of mind, and social scientific, political and ideological issues surrounding this domain.

<sup>47</sup> Poortinga and Schruijer, 'Gustav Jahoda', 373.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>50</sup> Jahoda, *A History of Social Psychology*.



In appreciating Jahoda's legacy, Dasen, Mishra and Wassmann emphasise the importance of his early work that was concerned with validity and reliability in cross-cultural research, confronting methodological problems, including his own.<sup>51</sup> Carl Ratner esteemed Jahoda as 'perhaps the first modern cross-cultural psychologist. He has done pioneering research that plumbed important methodological issues.'<sup>52</sup> Robert Serpell brings to attention the importance of Jahoda's influence on ethno-linguistic, disciplinary and historical approaches in pedagogical practices in Africa.<sup>53</sup> This is particularly important in child development, to combine indigenous traditions with pedagogical innovation. He appreciates Jahoda's fluent knowledge of several languages and his sensitivity to, and limitations of, translations of social scientific terminology. He maintains that over a period of a long time 'Jahoda provided the international community of academic scholarship with a dazzling array of insights into how different disciplines within which human development has been investigated in Africa has influenced the practices of different research cultures.'<sup>54</sup> These insights influenced the practices of different research communities, as well as led to the development of new concepts, theories and methods within and beyond those disciplines.

In re-appreciating Gustav Jahoda's work, Poortinga and Schruijer recall 'the prophets in the old testament of the bible who issued grave warnings'.<sup>55</sup> While they may not have been fully welcome in their own time and context because their admonitions were not appreciated by those at whom they were directed, 'Gustav rarely directed his arrows at insignificant issues' and 'being the target of Gustav's criticisms can be seen as a mark of distinction' because the issue was thought to be of some influence. Jahoda was always concerned with important themes, directing attention to the possibilities of the genuine theoretical and methodological development of social sciences. In his evaluation of Jahoda's oeuvre, Jaan Valsiner appreciates Gustav Jahoda as a deeply critical and constructive mind, someone who did not try to assemble followers of his theories in the busy academic life: 'Yet, he was always there ... an honest scholar for whom all institutional absurdities of the games universities play were foreign. He was a Thinker in its own right. This is the highest appreciation any scholar of today can get.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> P. R. Dasen, R. C. Mishra and J. Wassmann, 'Quasi-experimental research in culture sensitive psychology', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 327–42.

<sup>52</sup> C. Ratner, 'Jahoda, Gustav', in R. W. Rieber (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the History of Psychological Theories* (New York, 2012), chapter 28.

<sup>53</sup> R. Serpell, 'Situated understanding of human development in Africa: systematic inquiries at the nexus of psychology, social science and history', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 382–97.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>55</sup> Poortinga and Schruijer, 'Gustav Jahoda', 378.

<sup>56</sup> J. Valsiner, 'Culture, mind and history: building on the contributions of Gustav Jahoda', *Culture & Psychology*, 24 (2018), 398–400.

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