

# PACIFIC STUDIES

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE GANG OF FOUR: GREGORY BATESON, RUTH BENEDICT,  
REO FORTUNE, AND MARGARET MEAD IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

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## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE has its roots in several conferences, held between 2001 and 2005, to mark the Centennials of Margaret Mead (2001) and Gregory Bateson (2004); among these were five sessions at the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) conferences between 2001 and 2005. Several contributors to these earlier conferences participated in a formal symposium, *The Gang of Four: Gregory Bateson, Ruth Benedict, Reo Fortune, and Margaret Mead in Multiple Contexts*, which convened in February 2005 during the annual meetings of ASAO on Lihū'e, Kaua'i Island, Hawai'i.

The papers from that symposium, which comprise this special issue, seek to understand the complex and multifaceted legacy of a unique group of anthropologists. Gregory Bateson, Ruth Benedict, Reo Fortune, and Margaret Mead knew each other personally and intellectually. They all worked with or wrote about peoples of Oceania and beyond at a time when the anthropological endeavor was seen as an important social and intellectual contribution to the understanding of human cultures.

This group of anthropologists and their mutual encounters produced a wealth of books and essays that explored diverse topics, many of which prefigured contemporary disciplinary concerns. These groundbreaking publications include Bateson's *Naven* (1936); Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946); Fortune's *Sorcerers of Dobu* (1932a), *Omaha Secret Societies* (1932b), *Manus Religion* (1935), and *Arapesh* (1942); and Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930), and *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive*

*Societies* (1935); and Bateson's and Mead's *Balinese Character* (1942), among other works. This is a considerable volume of research and writing. More importantly, the scholarly corpus produced by these four anthropologists remains a touchstone for Oceanists, in particular, and anthropologists and historians more generally. Margaret Mead's publications still have the capacity to inspire public interest, while anthropologists and historians continue to revisit Mead's enormous body of published and unpublished work (Molloy 2009; Shankman 2009a; Sullivan 2009; Tiffany 2009; Yans 2009). Academic interest in Mead has increased, inspired in part by Derek Freeman's (1983, 1999) famous attacks on Mead's analysis of Samoa (Shankman 2009b), while others have taken issue with her work in Melanesia. Gregory Bateson's *Naven* (1936) remains an inspiration for those who seek to understand the processes of relations (Guddemi 2006, 2007, 2009; see also Yans 2009). Ruth Benedict's classic, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), is required reading on college campuses, while her corpus of work inspires contemporary rereadings and analysis (Schachter 2009; Tannenbaum 2009). Reo Fortune, often viewed as the most obscure member of the Gang of Four, has long exerted influence, especially among *Kula* scholars and those who work among the Arapesh (Dobrin and Bashkow 2006, n.d.; Lohmann 2009; Munn 1986; Roscoe 2003).

As anthropological myth would have it, in late 1932 and early 1933, all four of these anthropologists were present in the mosquito room on the Sepik River for a moment every bit as iconic and transformative as Bronislaw Malinowski's exile in Kiriwina. Granted, Benedict's presence took the form of a draft of *Patterns of Culture*, but was no less significant for all that. In this moment, alliances shifted and new lines of work emerged (see also Yans 2009).

These four scholars—frequently categorized as members of the so-called “School of Culture and Personality”—are, in the editors' opinion, too often treated as if their work is completely understood thereby. In developing such a canonical approach, present-day anthropologists have too often neglected elements of the work, its influence, and the influences upon it. We hope that by drawing attention to some of these more neglected elements we can contribute to a reevaluation of the Gang of Four's work and we can suggest something of its breadth and continuing importance. We can learn as much, we think, from what has fallen through the cracks—from what has been forgotten—as from that which has been remembered and sometimes remembered too well.

Like the iconic, transformative moment in the mosquito room on the Sepik River, certain essays are easily placed in Oceania. Paul Shankman deconstructs Freeman's published narrative of his criticisms of Mead's

work, focusing on the absence of any reference to Mead in Freeman's master's thesis on Samoa. Sharon Tiffany rereads Mead's ethnographic bestseller, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and finds a nuanced and multivocalic text. Phillip Guddemi examines Bateson's influence on a trio of Oceanic scholars: Roger Keesing, Robert Levy, and Roy Rappaport. Other essays in this collection range more widely while still referring to Oceania. Gerald Sullivan continues his analysis of Mead and Bateson's scientific project, following Mead's enquiry about the interactions between children and their caregivers, beginning with a memorandum Mead wrote in 1938 while working with Bateson among the Iatmul. Caroline Thomas provides Fortune with a much needed biography, examining not only Fortune's time in Oceania, but also the fallout from his break with Mead and, by extension, Benedict. Other papers concern earlier work, later developments, or both. Roger Lohmann considers Fortune's first book, *The Mind in Sleep* (1927), with Fortune's later ethnographic work in mind. Nicola Tannenbaum, a specialist on the Shan, examines Benedict's wartime study of Thailand, itself a part of the national character studies that can be traced back to the mosquito room moment and to Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934). Judith Schachter looks to Benedict and the connections between her early study of Mary Wollstonecraft and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946). By examining scholarly reviews of Mead's and Fortune's early ethnographies, as well as Mead's responses thereto, Maureen Molloy examines a past consensus of anthropological visions, methods, and tasks, as well as Mead's extensive role in articulating visions, methods, and tasks much closer to our own. John Gilkeson, an historian, looks to another important anthropologist of the period, Clyde Kluckhohn, and to the ethical implications of the sort of multicultural and multifaceted approaches developed in no small part by Bateson, Benedict, Fortune, and Mead.

Thus, for good reason, the works and lives of the Gang of Four (the editors' affectionate term for this quartet) continue to draw the attention of scholars working in several disciplines and genres. This attention is reflected in the current proliferation of biographies (Banner 2003; Lapsley 1999; Young 2005); interpretive collections (Caffrey and Francis 2006; Janiewski and Banner 2004; Tiffany 2005); academic works recently published or in progress (Crook 2007; Gilkeson n.d.; Lutkehaus 2008; Molloy 2008; Sullivan 1999); and numerous journal articles—many of which have been authored by contributors to this collection, and by others (e.g., Guddemi 2006, 2007; Ness 2008; Silverman 2005; Sullivan 2004, 2008; see also Yans 2009).

Our task in this special issue, then, is threefold: to examine the significance of the work by these four anthropologists, both individually and collectively; to examine the influence of Bateson, Benedict, Fortune, and

Mead upon other scholars (e.g., Gilkeson 2009; Guddemi 2009; Molloy 2009; Shankman 2009a; Thomas 2009); and to consider elements of their respective research that are often glossed over or forgotten (e.g., Lohmann 2009; Schachter 2009; Sullivan 2009; Tannenbaum 2009; Tiffany 2009). Virginia Yans, an historian and long-time student of the Mead Papers, considers what these essays taken together say about how anthropologists view their past in the present moment.

The coeditors of this project also have personal reasons for putting together this special collection. Gerald Sullivan first travelled to Bali in the late 1960s. He read Gregory Bateson's 1937 article, "An Old Temple and a New Myth," while still an undergraduate. Ultimately, his pursuit of Bateson, hence Mead, led him to the Margaret Mead Papers archived in the Manuscript Reading Room of the Library of Congress. His first day working with those papers was also Derek Freeman's last day; this would have been about 1992. Sullivan began a study of Mead and Bateson's Balinese materials, beginning with the village census for Bayung Gede, the highland village that had been Mead and Bateson's primary field site off and on from March 1936 until February 1939. Realizing that he did not know why Mead and Bateson had collected the materials they had, Sullivan read their research proposals from the Mead Papers. What Sullivan found was big science 1930s style, but big science of which he had not been previously aware. Mead and Bateson's scientific project has been the focus of Sullivan's research ever since. He met Sharon Tiffany in that same Manuscript Reading Room in 1995. His work now concerns not just the Gang of Four, but also the intellectual world within and against which Mead and Bateson's research grew, as well as the worlds of highland Bali in which these two worked so tirelessly.

Sharon Tiffany first read Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) as an undergraduate. Tiffany took a copy of *Coming of Age in Samoa* (in addition to *Social Organization of Manu'a*; Mead 1930 [1969]) to the field, where she conducted her doctoral research during 1969–1971 on Samoan social organization in the islands of Upolu and Savai'i in Western Samoa, with occasional side trips to American Samoa. During that first, transformative period of fieldwork, Tiffany met her fellow student and future colleague, Paul Shankman, a contributor to this special issue. Mead's texts inspired Tiffany's fieldwork in many ways: to observe the social processes of domestic relations and kinship ties for mobilizing labor power and resources for ceremonial redistributions of wealth; and to understand the dynamics of land and chiefly title disputes, based on Land and Title Court case files. Like Mead, Tiffany also received a *taupou* (ceremonial maiden) title, and she occasionally danced for her chief's visiting relatives and guests. Tiffany made over a dozen return field

trips to Samoa over a period of some twenty years. Tiffany's interest in the South Seas and popular media eventually led her to the Mead Papers at the Library of Congress in 1995, where she met Gerald Sullivan and other Mead scholars over the years. Her interest in gender and representation in the South Seas continues.

Many participants contributed their time and comments to the 2005 ASAO discussions and subsequent preparation for publication. We are, therefore, deeply grateful to the following persons: Mary Catherine Bateson for her continued interest and support of our endeavors; Phillip Guddemi, Nancy Lutkehaus, and Nancy McDowell for their incisive questions and commentaries during the 2005 ASAO symposium's proceedings; and Dale B. Robertson and Phillip McArthur, former and current editors in chief, respectively, of *Pacific Studies*, for their commitment to this project. The ASAO symposium in 2005 drew many interested participants, some of whom were unable to contribute essays to this special issue; their presence and comments are gratefully acknowledged. We would especially like to thank ASAO and its membership for kindly providing us with a venue for our mutual explorations. We dedicate this special issue to the late Mary Wolfskill, former Head, Reference and Reader Service Section of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress. Without Mary's efforts, encouragement, and friendship we would likely not have undertaken this project.

*Gerald Sullivan*  
*Sharon W. Tiffany*  
 September 2009

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