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## FOOTNOTES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

### An Efficient Sample of One: Margaret Mead Leaves the Sepik (1938)

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In 1978, soon after Margaret Mead died, I visited Gregory Bateson, then living in Big Sur, California, in connection with the biography which I was writing about him (Lipset 1982). "I am sure she's got the kinship system and is already working out how the babies are handled," he said, warmly referring to the social organization of the afterlife which he assumed she was busily sorting out. "They always criticized her speed which made her anthropology unbelievable to many people."

I left for Papua New Guinea, six months after Bateson's death in July 1980, to do fieldwork on a Sepik River culture--Murik--which I had selected because of an interest in political development in that newly independent state. In the course of my early research I came across a 1936 reference in Oceania to a then on-going study of the Murik people by Louis Pierre Ledoux, an American college graduate whom Mead had sent there to fill an important gap in the ethnography of this region. Subsequently, while still in the field, I contacted Ledoux, and he generously provided me with his notes (600 pages) as well as several hundred photographs.

Among his notes was a five-page document, "On Murik Social Structure," written by Mead herself on the basis of a two-day interview she had conducted in 1938 with a Murik informant who was working on the "Lady Betty," the schooner on which Mead and Bateson had left eight months of difficult fieldwork among Iatmul. They had been collecting photographic data on Iatmul children to use comparatively with the Balinese data they had been gathering for the two previous years (see Bateson and Mead 1942).

While waiting for a few days in Wewak, the East Sepik district capital, Mead decided to help her student who had by that time returned to New York where he was floundering with his manuscript (which he ultimately abandoned). But she was also satisfying her own ethnographic curiosity about Murik culture which had been aroused during her earlier three-culture Sepik fieldwork with Fortune during 1931-33. The Murik were a regionally well-known seafaring people who specialized in the entrepreneurial exchange of traditional valuables--plaited baskets, dances and ornaments (see Lipset 1985) to such tribes as Arapesh whom Mead had studied.

Reading and rereading Mead's "On Murik Social Structure" while in the field, and in the perplexing years since then, I still find what she accomplished in a few whirlwind hours

remarkable. I think the piece also raises two points of relevance to her biography and the history of anthropology. The first is that by 1938 she had developed a powerful research tool--the extended interview with a single informant--which she could apply quickly, given an articulate and willing informant, where she had comprehensive ethnological background, to generate rich and accurate data on social organization--whatever the objections raised about her earlier fieldwork in Samoa.

The second point is that fifteen years later, having embarked on somewhat questionable national character research at Columbia University, Mead defended the methodological utility and validity of using such samples of one by arguing that quality of informant-interviewer relations was more significant than number of them. "Any member of a group" she maintained, "provided that his position within that group is properly specified, is a perfect sample of the group-wide pattern on which he is acting as informant" (1953a:648 [italics mine]).

"On Murik Social Structure," the text of which follows below, demonstrates the effectiveness of this rather extreme claim. Mead begins it by identifying and assessing the status of her informant in the social structure whose major elements she then surveys: village and hamlet divisions, clanship, descent, residence, inheritance, ritual relationships, kinship terms, age-grades, and religion.

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 "Murik Social Structure"

Done in Wewak, November 19 and 20th, 1938. Nov. 19 MM alone.  
 Nov. 20. MM and GB.

Kumin	Informant's name
Murik	Village
Wakamot	Hamlet Division
Tongoet	Clan (immigrant in grandfather's time
Salinamot	Mother's Clan from Karau)
Kandarin	Wife's Clan
Cassowary	Tabooed animal
Maro brag	Personal Shamanic War Spirit
Younger Brother Group	Age Grade Position
Kombet	Hair Cut
Father	Dead
Mother	Living
MB	Dead before birth
Elder Brothers	1. Sangi 2. Yakin
E/Bros' Age Grade Pos.	1. Grandfather's Grade 2. Father's
Children	One daughter
Djaumba (Wakamot)	Hereditary Feasting Partner (through M)
Keliva (Gomeron)	Hereditary Feasting Partner (through F)
Head Ornament	Owed maternal Feasting Partner

Note on informant quality. Kumin has been a police boy and a respectful of old custom, willing to think over a point and correct it. The first day he left out some of the affinal terms, and came back the next day with the corrections. He was however willing to generalize on individual cases, and gave the impression of making impromptu generalizations rather than of uttering reliable cliches. His disadvantages as an informant were mainly in his structural position, grandson of an emigrant (only one brother came to Murik), no living mother's brother or father's sister, resident, normally in place of paternal grandfather; no sons; and his wife is his sister's husband's brother's daughter which blurred his conception of affinal terms.

Method of Work Genealogy taken and list of personal relationships, as feasting partners, etc. of his brother's and sisters. Check questions based on others' clan, wife's clan, and the clans of the two feasting partners, which was the limit with which he could deal quickly. Questions asked were not recorded as there wasn't time, and I was working mainly to check up points, and get some idea of the structure. Questions asked were based on Pierre [Ledoux's] mss., and on Yuat River [Mundugumor] and Middle Sepik [Iatmul] leads, as Pierre [Ledoux] had been provided with Arapesh leads before.

The village of Murik consists of a series of hamlets, or residential patrilineal units, each one of which is composed of one or more patrilineal clans (pigeons). Some of these clans regard each other as more closely related than others, in the position of elder and younger brother groups, and this relationship may cut across hamlet lines. Also a hamlet may, by accepting a single matrilocally resident immigrant into its midst, incorporate a clan which traces no patrilineal relationship to the other clans in the hamlet. Clans seem to act as units, in respect to feasting partner obligations, "helping" the principal feasting partner, and in brother-in-law exchanges and mother's brother-sister's son exchanges.

There is considerable confusion on the whole question of inheritance as matriloal residence and immigration from village to village, are both very common. There seems to be a series of discrepant ideas: that a certain type of thing, e.g., a haircut should be inherited from one's clan; that men should inherit from their fathers and women from their mothers; that a going feasting relationship between males who nevertheless are following their mother, not their fathers, should take precedence over the patrilineally inherited feasting relationships, etc. Consequently, analysis of practice gives an exceedingly mixed picture. There are undoubtedly a great number of exceptions to every one of the structural statements which I shall make, but nevertheless I think that a clear patrilineal totemism and general structural patrilineality does exist, with a strong complimentary matrilineal system--as in most parts of Oceania--and also a local tendency, which Murik shares with the cultures near the mouth

of the Yuat, of muddling inheritance and transmitting across sex lines. (This tendency once structuralized results in the Mundugumor "rope." If it became just a little bit looser than it is at present, we would begin to think of Murik as a bilateral system). With this statement in mind, read all further statements about structure.

The following things are clan owned, and may be described as totems (in the sense in which GB describes the Iatmul system, cf. Oceania 1932, "Social Structure of the Iatmul.") Although they are clan owned, they are not always patrilineally inherited. So we have: a) clan owned objects which are patrilineally inherited and given through daughters--the brag [spirit masks] appeared to be a case, (but no negative statement is valid of course) (only I expect Pierre to have some material on this point); b) clan owned objects which should be given only through daughters, e.g., matrilineal names...but are nevertheless sometimes given through males; e.g., a man inherited his mother's brother's name, does not use it himself, but gives it to his own son; c) relationships which can be inherited through either father or mother--the feasting partner relationship for example.

A clan owned object may be either patrilineally or matrilineally inherited, in individual cases, but continues to be regarded as clan owned, and there are clan quarrels about the alienation of names. So although a woman may give a name from her clan which is regarded as a patrilineal name to her son, it is still clan property...There is also considerable irregularity; a man may give his mother's brother's name to his son, and a woman may give her father's name to her son, neither of which follows any pattern.

(Disregard this red it is done to amuse watching children.)

Clan owned objects are: patrilineal names, matrilineal names, brags [spirit masks], garamut names, garamut calls, a tabooed animal, a totemic hair cut, a tattoo mark, a kind of ginger, a tangget [ginger leaf property marker], a leaf which is used in washing, initiatory spears and flutes which are regarded as accomplishments of the brag, house sites.

The mother's clan is referred to in Pidgin [English] as "blood" (as it is also on the Sepik river). So one's father's "blood" is father's mother's clan. (There are a few statements in Pierre's mss which don't fit with this at all, and which should be examined very carefully. The most puzzling one is where the taboo following a woman's death is relaxed if her widower marries a woman of another "blood". I have no idea what--in terms of the rest of the social structure--this can mean). In feasts for children, they are usually feasts to the child's mother's brother and his wife--e.g., the child's father's wife's brother and his wife--and in the case of female children, there is also a feast to the father's sisters. Mother's brothers and father's sisters occupy a symmetrical position in regard to opposite sex siblings, father's sisters officiating for brother's

daughters and mother's brothers for sister's sons. Owing perhaps to this fact, mother's brother and father's sisters are classified together as "kandere," the latter being called kandere mara, and there is a tendency in pidgin to call also mother's sisters and mother's brother's wives, kandere, which is not born out by the kinship terminology. (This symmetrical treatment of father's sisters and mother's [brothers] is strictly paralleled on the Yuat (Mundugumor) where the father's sister pierces her brother's daughter's ears and is paid for it, and the mother's brother initiates his sister's son.)

The kinship system is of the Yuat type--and is very simplified for New Guinea. [Mead then gives an accurate list of Murik kinship terms which would be classed as generational Hawaiian today]...Affinal terms are more complete... I didn't have time to work on affinal behaviour at all, beyond the bare statement that all of these relationships were wandik, which he said was the general term for tambu [avoidance affinal].

The age-grades: There are 5 named grades, meaning respectively "the old men"...; "the grandfathers" or "the grandfather people;"...the "father people"....; the "elder brother people,"...and the "younger brother people" [vernacular terms deleted]. At any given time in the House Tamberan there are three active grades, the fathers, elder brothers and younger brothers; the two oldest grades having become mere figureheads, who sit down and dress up like marsalaes [spirit figures]. There is an unnamed dual division with the grandfathers and elder brothers on one side of it and the fathers and younger brothers on the other. When the new unnamed line of younger brothers enter the House Tamberan, the present younger brothers become elder brothers, the elder brothers become fathers, and the fathers retire. So a man passes through each of these named age grades in turn. Kumin's two brothers were respectively grandfathers' grade and fathers' grade, he has one sengan [feasting partner] in his own grade and one in the elder brother's grade, so it is clear that the age span is very narrow and most of the men over forty would be figureheads...

In the ceremonial license, the women of the lower grade are offered to the men of the next grade above. Informant was vague about women's grades except in this statement.

#### Diagram of Initiatory System

One side...not named,  
referred to as "Elder brothers"

2. Grandfathers
4. Elder Brothers

Other side referred to as  
"Younger brothers"

1. Great Grandfathers
3. Fathers
5. Younger Brothers

1 initiated 2, 2 initiated 3, etc. When the next line of novices, who are referred to merely by the name of a child who will be one of them, come in, they will become 5, the men of 5 will become 4, etc. and the whole system changes sides, but the same people remain in groups opposing each other.

He claimed that line 3 plays no role, that 4 first makes the line 5 "save" [feel pain] and then "makes them alright" later.<sup>2</sup>

Hereditary marsalae. The brag is a named marsalae [spirit figure], associated with a definite named locale in the bush, who is represented by a carved wooden figure, kandimbwag, the figure itself being kept in the house of the present owner, and renewed when necessary. The figure is treated as a shrine of the marsalae. Offerings of betel and tobacco are put beside it when someone wishes the marsalae to enter the body of a member of the patrilineal group who is a shaman, possessed by the marsalae which the figure represented (This offering is supposed to be made secretly, and then the shaman goes into trance.) The marsalae may also, through his shaman announce that he wishes to put in an appearance, in which case a special house and enclosure is built for him, and the sengan (hereditary feasting partner of the man who is giving the feast) wears the kandimbwag figure-- that is he carries it on a high pole and his body is covered with sago leaves so that it becomes virtually a mask. There is then a big food and pigs presentation to the sengan who has carried the kandimbwag, which is spoken of as the child of its owners. (This integration between the hereditary named marsalae carved figures and the feasting partner/pattern is typically Mundugumor. Kumin's father had one kandimbwag which had been made for him by a trade friend in another village (Gauian?).

The shaman, who is possessed by the marsalae, and who would be a member of his patrilineal group, but not necessarily the owner of the kandimbwag representation, goes into trance beginning with a trembling of the leg, as a Iatmul shaman does. (See Oceania article, loc. cit.) He makes prophecies as to whether a sick person will recover, but we note no instances of his prescribing sacrifices or remedies. Without the intervention of trance, a man may call upon his own marsalae (brag) to go with him and strengthen his arm to kill.

The brags also play a part in the initiatory system. They each have a set of initiatory flutes connected with them and also the special cassowary feathered spears in ? pairs. The flutes are kept in the House Tambaran and the spears near the kandimbwag figures. The garamut is conceived as belonging to the figure.

The whole system represents a most interesting integration of Yuat and Middle Sepik ideas...The [spirit] figures are owned by family lines, playing a part in ceremonial feasts between feasting partners, and their connection with marsalae associated with definite localities in the bush is Mundugumor-like, and the trance phenomena and role in killing, is Iatmul-like.

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Mead's data on kinship, residence, ritual relationships, cult age-grades and religion conform to what I collected in 1981-82. My main problem with the piece is her assumption that inheritance is patrilineal and in her use of the analytical term "clan," which commonly refers to an unilineal descent group. In 1981-1982, the term does not seem applicable to any reference group in the society. What she calls "clans" based on patrilineal totemism are actually endogamous, dispersed, nonunilineal descent groups in which both male and female links are claimed. Siblingship, rather than descent, is key. Cult membership and inheritance of the brag spirit, are not patrilineal at all, but are based on matrifiliation.

In Arapesh, Iatmul or Tchambuli, patriclans organized society. In Mundugumor, which Mead repeatedly compares to Murik, she had seen that descent and inheritance were not sex-bound. She apparently did not have Hogbin's Wogeo Island data (e.g., Hogbin 1934-35) at hand either, and of course debate about nonunilineal descent and filiation had not yet begun in 1938. So it is to her credit that the contradictions are clearly recognizable in her discussion. She states that sex lines are muddled in Murik inheritance. The notion of descent "is exceedingly mixed" and is subject to "considerable confusion." There are patriclan owned sacrae which are "not always patrilineally inherited...[and are] given through daughters," and matriclan owned names which "are nevertheless sometimes given through males."

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1. To Mead's five single spaced pages, Bateson added a brief note on the comparative usage of the notion of "blood" to express social relationships in Iatmul. "The Iatmul use of the term "blood" in pidgin [English] links up with their theory of conception that the bones of the child come from the father and the blood and meat from the mother. In the native language a man will say "I am in the body of Bowi clan" meaning that "I am child of a woman of Bowi," or "Bowi are my mother's brother group"...The "blood" metaphor is not used in the native language. Similarly, a man will say "em i one blood belong me" and this may mean either "he and I are both children of women of the same clan," or "he is child of a woman of my clan," or "he is a brother of my mother."

2. What is meant here is that the elder brothers' grade make the younger brothers' grade feel pain ("make them know"), by demanding sexual favors of the wives of novices as partial payment for initiating them. Power and status in the Murik men's cult, that is, used to derive from giving up rights to wives' sexuality (see Lipset 1984).

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#### RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Fernando Estevez (Cultural Anthropology, Universidad de La Laguna, Canary Islands) is currently preparing a doctoral dissertation treating the history of anthropological inquiry into the aboriginal population (the Guanches) of the Canary Islands, which since a very early period in European expansion have been a stopoff point for voyagers and expeditions.

Robert Procter (History of Science, Stanford) is preparing a manuscript on the participation of the German medical community in the development of Nazi racial science.

Michael Tarabulski (214 W. Gilman, Madison, Wis.) is doing research (including videotaped interviews) on the Beloit College Logan African Expedition of 1930, focussing on the career of the archeologist Alonzo W. Pond, leading toward a reunion/symposium of participants in October, 1985 at Beloit.

Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay (History, Northwestern) is working on a doctoral dissertation entitled "The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860 to 1915," which will focus on Tylor, Max Muller, Lang, Robertson Smith, Frazer and Marett.

Patrick Wolfe (Anthropology, London School of Economics) is doing research for an M.Phil. on the topic of anthropological interest in dreaming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Kristen L. Zacharias (Wyomissing, Pa.) is doing research on the anthropology of Thomas Huxley.