



Margaret Mead, Reo Fortune, and Mountain Arapesh Warfare

ABSTRACT In *Sex and Temperament*, Margaret Mead depicted the Mountain Arapesh of New Guinea as a gentle, nurturant people among whom warfare was "practically unknown." A few years later, however, Reo Fortune, her husband and cofieldworker, was to claim that warfare was "good Arapesh custom." This article reexamines this disagreement, addressing two issues: Did the Arapesh have a tradition of warfare?, and How do we reconcile the differences in Mead and Fortune's descriptions? I conclude that, prior to pacification, the Mountain Arapesh resorted to significant levels of violence and waged war on a regular basis. Mead was drawn to a contrary conclusion because of the comparative nature of her analysis and because of covert licenses in the theoretical gestalt she had acquired from Ruth Benedict, which rendered her analysis immune to contradictory data. I suggest that Freeman overlooked the effects of this gestalt in assessing Mead's work in Samoa. [Keywords: Margaret Mead, Reo Fortune, Mountain Arapesh warfare, Derek Freeman, Samoa]

WITH THE STURM UND DRANG of the Mead-Freeman Samoa controversy now past, it may be safe to consider what lessons we can learn from a further, perhaps more striking instance in which Margaret Mead and another ethnographer differed in their conclusions regarding the particulars of a Pacific culture. In late 1931, about five years after Mead had finished her Samoan work, she and her second husband, Reo Fortune, traveled to the Sepik region of New Guinea, where they took up residence in Alitua, the principal ceremonial center of a Mountain Arapesh locality also known as Alitua (Roscoe 1994a). Eight months later, the pair moved to the Middle Sepik region, working first among the Mundugumor (or Biwat) of the Yuat River and then with the Tchambuli (or Chambri) of Chambri Lakes.

In 1935, Mead published her first book on her Sepik research, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (2001), and it remains among her best-known works. Through a comparison of gender concepts and behaviors among the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Chambri, she sought to demonstrate that the aggressive, dominating temperament traditionally regarded in the West as male and the passive, nurturant temperament associated with females were not the immutable consequence of biology, as popular opinion then supposed. Instead, temperaments were the malleable result of culture and learning. Mead found that, among the Mundugumor, both men and women were violent, aggressive, and insecure. Among the

Chambri, women tended to dominate and men were dependent and irresponsible. And then there were the Mountain Arapesh.

The Arapesh case anchors *Sex and Temperament*. Half of the book's pages are given over to describing a culture in which "both men and women are naturally maternal, gentle, responsive, and unaggressive" (Mead 2001:149). What captured attention, however, was the corollary to this gentle and compassionate temperament: "Warfare is practically unknown among the Arapesh. There is no head-hunting tradition, no feeling that to be brave or manly one must kill. Indeed, those who have killed men are looked upon with a certain amount of discomfort, as men slightly apart" (Mead 2001:21). There were, she allowed, "traditions of hostile encounters with more warlike beach people in former days when the mountain people went down to obtain sea-water for salt" (Mead 2001:9). But this was not the case among the mountain people themselves. There were no "organized expeditions to plunder, conquer, kill, or attain glory" (Mead 2001:21). To the extent that confrontations occurred at all, they took the form of "brawls and clashes between villages . . . mainly over women" (Mead 2001:21-22) or "occasional semi-hostile clashes . . . between hamlets or clusters of hamlets across locality lines" (Mead 2001:15). Even on these occasions, however, fighting was ritualized to attempt to avoid killing and to displace moral responsibility for any deaths that inadvertently did occur (Mead 2001: 22-23, 128).

Subsequently, Mead was to reiterate this picture, claiming that "the Arapesh have no pattern of real warfare" (1937:35) and that warfare was limited to "skirmishes between hamlets or clusters of hamlets in occasional conflicts over the elopement or theft of a woman" (1961:1438).

Mead and Fortune's marriage barely survived their Sepik fieldwork and their chance encounter with Gregory Bateson, who had just returned for further field study among the Iatmul of the Middle Sepik. On their return from New Guinea in 1933, Mead and Fortune divorced and, in 1936, one year after their divorce was finalized, Mead and Bateson were married en route to fieldwork in Bali (Howard 1984:180–187).

All of this is well known, but perhaps less known is what happened to Fortune after he departed Mead's life. Two years after the separation, he returned to New Guinea, to the Eastern Highlands, to conduct fieldwork among the Kamano who were at the time under minimal colonial control (McLean 1992). Warfare was still intense—Fortune witnessed two deadly ambushes (n.d.a:90)—and in late July 1935, following a four-day battle in Komonka, the local Australian patrol post forced him to withdraw. Retreating to the coast, he found Mead had sent him a copy of *Sex and Temperament*, and after reading it he decided, in his own words, to go "back to the Arapesh country to check a point or two" (Fortune n.d.b:4, also 1937:2).

For reasons that are unclear, he did not return to Alitua itself but spent three months with Suabybys clan in Liwo, a Mountain Arapesh locality about four kilometers north of Alitua (Fortune n.d.b:5). Drawing primarily on data from this second visit, he then published an article entitled simply "Arapesh Warfare," in which he courteously but flatly rejected Mead's claims about Arapesh pacificity (see also 1939:36).

Warfare was good Arapesh custom. It was distinguished from the sometimes heated quarrels between the turbulent clans of a single sovereign locality by its scale, its determination, and by its traditions and conventions. [Fortune 1939:27]

To support his claim, he provided a war leader's speech rallying the clans of a locality for a forthcoming battle and informant accounts of an intraclan homicide, a feud among the clans of Liwo locality, and an interlocality battle at the traditional war ground of Nuberum-Mugueruhunum.

Mead never publicly responded to Fortune's critique. In later publications, she did allow that they had weaponry, war-related ritual, and "a sort of informal warfare" (1947:180, 1940:437), but the differences between the two characterizations remained stark. Mead continued to assert that "they engage very little in warfare" (1949a:67); "there were always strong sanctions against [war], because of the outstanding feast plans" (1947:180); and when fighting did occur, the "aim was wide and low" and the fight "was customarily discontinued as soon as blood was drawn" (1940:437).

Mead and Fortune's differences over Mountain Arapesh warfare have not gone unnoticed and, at the height of the

Mead–Freeman controversy, were occasionally mentioned as an aside, even in the media. Yet the case never received close scrutiny, which is perhaps surprising because, superficially at least, it seems as relevant to Freeman's thesis as the Samoan case. For one thing, like Mead's work in Samoa, *Sex and Temperament* had a great deal of influence on U.S. anthropology and, perhaps, an even greater impact on U.S. social science in general. A survey of 112 introductory anthropology textbooks (Hays 1999:504), for example, found 44 percent citing Mead's work on the Arapesh, compared to the 64 percent that cited her Samoan work. An analysis of 27 introductory sociology texts (Hays 1997:97 n. 6) found that more than half (15) cited *Sex and Temperament*, compared to just one mention of *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). *Sex and Temperament's* continuing impact is also reflected in its several republications (1950, 1963, and 2001), its numerous reprintings, and its continuing presence on the syllabi for college undergraduates in anthropology, psychology, sociology, human development, and general education.

The further relevance of the Arapesh case to the Samoan controversy is that it raises the "observer effect" to especially sharp relief. During most of their Arapesh research, the pair occupied the same field house and studied the same people at the same moment in time. The only difference is that, two years later, Fortune spent a further three months in Liwo, Alitua's neighbor to the immediate north. The Arapesh case, in sum, is one of those rare instances when the "monological authority" of the ethnographer is radically undermined (Roscoe 1995:497–498).

The two other ethnographic case studies in *Sex and Temperament*, examining the Mundugumor and Chambri, have already received close scrutiny (Gewertz 1981; McDowell 1991). In this article, I reconsider the Mountain Arapesh, the third support for Mead's argument in *Sex and Temperament*.¹ With the aid of Mead and Fortune's publications and unpublished papers and my own fieldwork among the neighboring Yangoru Boiken, who appear to share a close genetic and cultural heritage with the Mountain Arapesh (Roscoe 1989, 1994b), I shall be concerned with two issues. First, did the Arapesh have a tradition of warfare or not; and second, how do we reconcile the differences in Mead and Fortune's descriptions? I argue that Fortune more accurately depicted Mountain Arapesh warfare. Prior to pacification, the Mountain Arapesh resorted to significant levels of violence and, by almost any definition of the term, they waged war on a regular basis. From this conclusion, I move to consider the more interesting issue of how and why Mead "got it wrong." I suggest that the answer is complex. In part, it was a product of her comparative framework: In comparison to the Mundugumor and Chambri, the Mountain Arapesh appeared to her to be relatively peaceful. However, it was also a product of covert theoretical licenses in the theoretical gestalt she had acquired from Ruth Benedict—factors Freeman seems to have overlooked in assessing Mead's work in Samoa.

MOUNTAIN ARAPESH WARFARE

My first reason for doubting that the Mountain Arapesh were as peaceful as Mead portrayed them stems from my own fieldwork amongst the Yangoru Boiken, a neighboring people who live immediately to the southeast. The Yangoru Boiken most definitely had a tradition of war: They ambushed slumbering hamlets under cover of night; they attacked parties of their enemies at work in the gardens or en route to coastal trade friends; and, from time to time, they fought prearranged battles at designated war grounds on the borders with their enemies. Much of this fighting was limited to their main settlements in the southern foothills of the Prince Alexander range, but it was also waged from their satellite settlements in the peaklands. At contact, these satellites lined the Mountain Arapesh border: Pitu, Ain, Hwielembora, and Meiwungu were all just five to ten kilometers from Mead and Fortune's field site in Alitua ceremonial center and even closer to other Mountain Arapesh settlements. Thus, if the Mountain Arapesh indeed had no established tradition of warfare, it is difficult to imagine that they would have survived for long against Yangoru Boiken attacks. Moreover, had the Yangoru Boiken somehow failed to exterminate them, the "Plains" Arapesh, who "fight with spears" and live immediately to their south, or the Abelam, "a gay artistic head-hunting people" (Mead 2001:10, 11) whose nearest villages are just 15 kilometers to the southeast, surely would have finished the job.

There is another reason, though, to doubt that the Mountain Arapesh were essential pacifists. Scattered through both Fortune and Mead's published and unpublished works is evidence of a significant level of homicidal violence, most of which constituted warfare by any definition. To begin with, there is a "census of the war records of individual, grey-headed old men" that Fortune conducted during his return visit to Mountain Arapesh territory: He found "that approximately fifty percent of them claimed one or more war homicides each to his credit. The others disclaimed personal homicides" (1939:27). Neither in his published work nor among his surviving papers did Fortune mention the site or size of this census, beyond a comment that it was "of the old men of Liwo and of Bugabehem localities" (Fortune n.d.c:51/118).

These old men were all grey beards and grandfathers, and men who had passed, at best estimate, the first 30 or 40 years of their lives free from the subsequent European subjugation and the subsequent outlawry of native warfare. Approximately every alternate old man had one or more homicides to his credit, but every other alternate old man had none. They all lent a very grave courtesy to replying to the writer's questions. [Fortune n.d.c:51/118; see also n.d.c:62]

In 1934, patrol officer Ken Thomas (1934:87) censused 97 adult males in Liwo and Bugabehem localities, so it is unlikely that "the old men" of these two localities exceeded 30. Too many unknown demographic and historical variables intervene to make any defensible guess about

the mortality rate in Arapesh violence from these data, but if Fortune's sample was representative, then it was clearly significant.

This conclusion is buttressed by two further sources of information. The first is Fortune's estimate that, in the "inter-municipal affrays" that occasionally followed a married woman's elopement, "about four persons were killed and several wounded" (1947:253). The second is a tally of Arapesh killings and woundings scattered throughout Mead and Fortune's published and unpublished writings. These indicate that, over the space of about twenty-five years (1900–26), members of Alitua locality participated in killing at least 11 people (one of them a member of Alitua) and wounding 12 others (four of them members of Alitua), while they themselves sustained at least eight deaths and one wounding at the hands of other localities.² Between 1880 and 1920, members of Liwo locality participated in killing at least 16 people (ten of them members of Liwo) and seriously wounding 23 others (18 of them from Liwo), while themselves suffering at least eight deaths and five serious woundings by other localities. More than 90 percent of these killings and over 80 percent of the woundings occurred over about 15 years, between 1908 and 1920.³

To look at it in another way, between about 1900–25, Alitua, a locality of 216 people in 1932, and Liwo, a locality censused at 181 people in 1934, were each participating in the killing, on average, of at least one person about every other year and the serious wounding of at least one more (Mead 1947:268, 389–395; Thomas 1934:87).⁴ At first blush, this might not seem an excessive rate, but these figures represent a mortality in war of at least ten percent of all deaths. This compares to rates of 20–35 percent in the Eastern Highlands, where fighting appears to have reached its deadliest intensity in all of New Guinea (e.g., Berndt 1973:397, 399; Hayano 1972:287; Robbins 1982:211).

These are conservative figures: they represent only those cases that appear in Mead and Fortune's published and unpublished papers. This does not mean, though, that they can be taken as minimum estimates of Arapesh violence. Ferguson and Whitehead (1992) have cogently argued that colonial expansion probably intensified "tribal" fighting at the edge of Empire, distorting the indigenous patterns reported in historical and ethnographic documents. In the Arapesh case, the most likely European influence to elevate homicide levels was introduced disease (Allen 1989:41–46). Since the Arapesh attributed fatal disease to sorcery, it is possible that deaths from introduced diseases could have inflated revenge killings with the spear—as seems to have occurred among the Etoro of the Papuan Plateau (Kelly 1977:30–31). According to Mead, a "few years" before she and Fortune arrived, the Mountain Arapesh had suffered an epidemic of what was probably influenza, but this could hardly have elevated homicide rates of a decade or more earlier (Mead 1947:345 n.4). Influenza outbreaks cannot be ruled out in earlier years, though, and around 1890 a smallpox epidemic may have

reached the Maprik region, some twenty-five kilometers to the southwest, possibly affecting them as well (Allen 1989:43).

There is reason to doubt, though, that these European diseases would have greatly magnified the killing rates computed above. For one thing, if the 1890 smallpox epidemic did reach Alitua and Liwo, any wave of revenge killings likely would have played out by 1900, when all but two of the listed killings begin. For another, at least within a locality moiety, the Arapesh preferred to avenge sorcery with sorcery, not with the spear (Fortune n.d.d:n.p., n.d.e:73/15, 74, n.d.f:7; Mead 1947:179). As Fortune once remarked, "sorcery [is] an inside job" (n.d.e:n.p., n.d.g:4). Sorcery attributed to the opposite moiety of a locality or to other localities was more likely to be avenged with the spear or arrow, but the only such case I have been able to locate involved a Liwo man's murder of an Alituan child to revenge a death due not to disease but to a fall from a tree.

However European disease may have inflated the number of killings listed in Mead and Fortune's accounts, its effects would have been significantly offset by another European-induced process: pacification. Pacification of the Mountain Arapesh was probably well underway by the mid-to-late 1910s, but it took several more years fully to take hold (Roscoe 2002:xxi). In other words, a significant proportion of the killings and woundings in the rates calculated above took place at a time when Arapesh warfare was being actively *suppressed*. In all, it seems safe to conclude that the computed rates of killing and wounding for Alitua and Liwo probably do not overemphasize the scale of Arapesh violence.

A final issue to be resolved, then, is whether this violence rose to the level of warfare. Mead appears to have thought of warfare as activity "in which defined groups engage in purposeful, organized and socially sanctioned combat involving killing each other. . . . Warfare exists if the conflict is organized, and socially sanctioned and the killing is not regarded as murder" (1968:215). If the incidents in Alitua and Liwo did not meet these specifications, then perhaps she could legitimately claim that the Mountain Arapesh had no established tradition of warfare. To the best of my knowledge, Mead never chose to explain her differences with Fortune on these grounds, and there are references to *war* and *warfare* scattered throughout her field notes. A closer examination of the incidents making up the Alitua and Liwo rates, moreover, suggests that the majority did constitute war—by Mead's or almost any other definition.

Fortune (1939:27–28, 32–33) distinguished three levels of Arapesh conflict. The first involved intraclan violence, which was morally repudiated and apparently rare; Fortune himself knew of only one case (1939:27–28), and none of the documented cases of woundings seem to have fallen into this category. The second type of conflict occurred between clans of the same locality. In these confrontations, killings and woundings did not provoke the

same level of moral repudiation as intraclan homicides. Nonetheless, the preference was to resolve quarrels at this level with sorcery rather than with the arrow or spear. Even when weapons were taken up, there is some evidence that restraint was exercised (1939:32–33). Significantly, perhaps, the Alitua and Liwo figures indicate that woundings were more common than killings in this type of combat: 43 percent of the woundings but only 26 percent of the killings were perpetrated between clans of the same locality. By any definition—not just Mead's—intraclan homicide would be difficult to categorize as "war"; in most lexicons, it constitutes murder. Some definitions might classify the second type of violence as "feud" rather than "war" on the basis that it was "a type of armed combat occurring *within* a political community" (Otterbein 1973: 923, emphasis added). It would be difficult, though, to extend this definitional claim to the third type of confrontation, conflicts between clans of different localities. These actions appear to have been morally acceptable if not extolled; some even involved prearranged confrontations on traditional battlefields located on locality borders (Fortune 1939:31,34–36); and they accounted for the majority of serious Arapesh violence—71 percent of the killings and 57 percent of the woundings in the Alitua and Liwo figures. It is doubtful, therefore, that Mead would or could have considered the violence in this third type of conflict to be anything other than war.

STUDYING THE MOUNTAIN ARAPESH

In sum, there are several reasons why Mead's conclusion that warfare was "practically unknown" among the Mountain Arapesh is untenable. The more interesting anthropological issue, though, is how she and Fortune, working at the same spatial and temporal junctures, could arrive at such diametrically opposed conclusions, and why it was Mead, and not Fortune, who was led astray. The obvious possibility is also the most provocative, and it was implied by a criticism to which Mead herself alluded. In the preface to the 1950 edition of *Sex and Temperament*, she wrote that some readers of the first edition (1935) had felt that her results formed " 'too beautiful' a pattern" (2001:xxvi). Supposedly, she and Fortune had chosen the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Chambri by chance, and, yet, along with the U.S. case, they exactly mapped all four possible permutations of gender and of nurturance and aggression: the Mundugumor—male aggressive, female aggressive; the U.S.—male aggressive, female nurturant; the Chambri—male nurturant, female aggressive; and the Mountain Arapesh—male nurturant, female nurturant. "This, many readers felt, was too much. It was too pretty. I must have found what I was looking for" (2001:xxvi).

Mead provides no source for this criticism, and I have been unable to locate any such comment in published work. Perhaps she was responding to gossip. Whatever the case, her readers were probably being polite. What many doubtless meant was that she needed Mountain Arapesh

males and females to be peaceful and nurturant if she were to make her theoretical case, and since their traditions of warfare contradicted her thesis, she camouflaged the evidence. To put it baldly, Mead fudged the data.

For several reasons, this conclusion is implausible. As Mead recounted matters, her theory emerged from her data, not the other way round. It was not until she was living with the Chambri—following her research among the Arapesh and Mundugumor—that she eventually developed the temperamental model into which she could fit U.S. culture and these three Sepik cultures (Mead 1972: 216–220; see also Bateson 1994:160–168; Howard 1984: 154–164). Of course, this claim might be *ex post facto* rationalization or obscuration, but there is compelling evidence to the contrary in letters she wrote from Alitua, before she and Fortune had ever set foot in the Middle Sepik. From a bulletin sent to friends at home, a couple of weeks after her arrival in Alitua:

They are very quiet and unaggressive. [Mead 1932a:2]

From a letter to Raymond Firth, the next day:

The people themselves are gentle, amiable, non-controversial and non-aggressive—much nicer than the Manus or the Dobuans. . . . Their confidence and friendliness is most disarming. [Mead 1932b]

In other words, Mead had already arrived at her notion of the gentle, nonaggressive Arapesh while she was still studying them—within a few days, in fact, of making their acquaintance.

If Mead had seriously intended to obscure the reality of Mountain Arapesh warfare, in fact, we should have to wonder why she made no attempt to shovel under the carpet the evidence she had gathered pointing to Arapesh aggression and violence. As Freeman (1999:9, 212) has noted in dismissing the idea that she deliberately falsified her Samoan data, she made her papers available for public scrutiny in the Library of Congress. Moreover, almost everything in her field notes concerning Arapesh violence also appears in one place or another in her published work. Indeed, in chapter 8 of *Sex and Temperament*—"The Arapesh ideal and those who deviate from it"—Mead explicitly drew attention to instances of aggression and violence. Finally, had she deliberately intended to mislead, she would have had to contend with the knowledge that Fortune could publicly refute her claims—as indeed he did in his *American Anthropologist* article, "Arapesh Warfare." Certainly, Fortune found numerous faults with *Sex and Temperament*, and scattered through his papers are the pages of several incomplete drafts of a manuscript attempting to account for inconsistencies between Mead's and his own research. Nowhere among the pages that have survived, however, does he make any suggestion that Mead deliberately mislead her readers.

Fortune's position, as best can be judged from partial evidence, was that Mead had failed to grasp the historical and cultural context of what she observed in Alitua. In particular, he felt she had incautiously taken the ethnographic

present as evidence for the ethnographic past, overlooking changes that 15–25 years of pacification had wrought. In support of her image of Mountain Arapesh peacefulness, for example, she commented, "There are no insignia of any sort for the brave" (2001:21); on a later occasion, "There are no rewards given to the homicide" (1937:35, see also 1940:437). In fact, Fortune was told, warriors who had killed in battle were entitled to paint black rings or bands on their faces below or around each nostril (n.d.b:n.p., n.d.e:23/22, 82). Thus, Mead could only have made such comments, Fortune felt, if she was going by what she observed in 1932. But "observations of 1932 alone could not establish the fact": Colonial authorities had discouraged such displays, and so "homicidal decorations were not worn at ceremonies by men . . . who were entitled to wear them if they wished to do so" (n.d.b:38).

Fortune also felt that faulty information on familial curses had reinforced a conviction in Mead that the Arapesh repressed aggressive behaviour and extolled the nurturing, parental behavior manifest in conscientious gardening, hunting, and family life. Unfortunately, his point is impossible to grasp because the pages preceding and following it in the manuscript are missing. Finally, Fortune believed, Mead's interpretation of Arapesh society was too subjective: She weighted *Sex and Temperament* "heavily with unacknowledged emotions" (n.d.b:n.p.).

Where subjectivity is concerned, of course, Mead and Fortune both brought biases to their Arapesh fieldwork, and a host of possibilities come to mind as to why he might be led to attend to their aggression and Mead to their nurturance. He was male, she was female. He was a New Zealander, she was a U.S. citizen. Mead herself thought this combination explained a lot. In explanation of what she perceived as his aggressiveness and her nurturance, she wrote, "Reo came from a culture in which boys were physically disciplined and men beat women. . . . I came from a family tradition within which probably no man had lifted a hand to strike a wife or child for several generations" (1972:198–199). Certainly, cultural and gender differences could have led Fortune to pay more attention than Mead to the details of Arapesh violence. Or, perhaps, the difference was a consequence of Mead's ankle injury, which confined her for the entire eight months of their Arapesh fieldwork to the immediate environs of Alitua ceremonial center. Fortune, by contrast, traveled widely both within and beyond Alitua locality. Of necessity, therefore, Mead might have focused on the domestic sphere, while Fortune gathered data on relations within and among localities.

Consonant with these possibilities, Mead's Arapesh field notes contain comparatively few references to fighting, violence, and homicide.⁵ The problem is that the same can be said of those few of Fortune's notes that appear to date from 1932. Virtually all of his published and unpublished references to violence and warfare, in fact, center around Liwo rather than Alitua locality, indicating

that they derive from his *second* visit in 1935, when he went back “to check a point or two” (Fortune n.d.b:4). Because anthropology has shown little interest in human warfare until quite recently, we should not be surprised that neither of the pair took much interest in the subject in 1932. In any case, there is little evidence that Fortune, as a mobile New Zealand male, paid any more attention to warfare than did Mead as a less mobile U.S. female—at least until 1935, when her published assertions on the subject served to focus his attention.

MOUNTAIN ARAPESH WARFARE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The most probable explanations for why Mead “got it wrong,” I argue, lie in the character of her comparative enterprise and the influence of Ruth Benedict on the analytical approach that Mead brought to the field. Mead was certainly wrong to state the case for Arapesh nonviolence and gentleness in absolute terms. Contrary to her characterization, the Mountain Arapesh could be quite aggressive and violent, and by any definition they had an established tradition of warfare. As a *relative* proposition, however, her position was more defensible: *Compared to other groups in New Guinea*, the Mountain Arapesh might have seemed relatively gentle, unaggressive, and nonwarlike.

When Mead had described the Arapesh in her letter to Firth as gentle, amiable, noncontroversial, and nonaggressive, she was voicing an opinion with which Fortune clearly agreed. Indeed, a couple of weeks later, Firth heard from Fortune: “They are a nice people, a pleasant change from Melanesians [i.e., the Manus and Dobuans?]” (Fortune 1932:1). Elsewhere, Fortune commented on their limited appetite for war:

It seems that the Arapesh broke very easily and very quickly in stand up fights, and that the victors did not pursue the routs far off a field. One concludes that the Arapesh did not care to inflict mortifications of the flesh more than they thought necessary for the maintenance of their religion and that some tribesmen, who were more bitter, would have considered them to be heretics in military matters. [Fortune n.d.f:7, see also 1939:37]

Indeed, in comparison to the Kamamentina Kamano, almost fifty percent of whom, he found, died as a result of war (n.d.a:12; McLean 1992:54), the Arapesh must have seemed paragons of nonviolence. In a revealing comparison, he commented:

Despite the duty of revenge undertaken by the Arapesh they were not as devoted to military action as were some other New Guinea tribesmen. One might mention the Kamamentina river Papuans or *those of the middle Sepik river area*, for example, as having been more devoted to military action than the Arapesh. [Fortune n.d.h:n.p., emphasis added]

In sum, Fortune also felt that Arapesh fighting was muted in comparison to warfare among many other New Guinea groups, not least Middle Sepik groups that included the Mundugumor and Chambri, Mead’s other case

studies. Indeed, Fortune (n.d.b:20, n.d.e:20) was of the opinion that what had helped mislead Mead was the absence among the Arapesh of head-hunting and cannibalism, which by contrast were prominent Mundugumor and Chambri practices. Because Mead’s project was a comparative one, the issue of whether or not the Arapesh had violence and war was less important to her thesis than the fact that, *in comparison to the Mundugumor and Chambri*, they seemed nonviolent and unwarlike. In *Sex and Temperament*, we might then suppose, her concern was to highlight the greater levels of violence and war among the Mundugumor and Chambri and their relatively attenuated level among the Arapesh, a consideration that could have exerted a subconscious selective pressure to emphasize the former and deemphasize the latter.

WARFARE, PATTERNS OF CULTURE, AND ANALYTICAL GESTALTS

If we now add to this selective pressure the analytical framework Mead brought to the field, her conclusions about Arapesh warfare seem almost inevitable. Shortly after they had moved to the Middle Sepik, Mead received from Ruth Benedict a manuscript draft of *Patterns of Culture* (Mead 1972:217). By this time, as Freeman (1983:72) has documented in some detail, Mead was already steeped in Benedict’s “discovery” that different cultures selectively emphasized certain human potentialities and disallowed others (Mead 1972:195–196). Benedict (1934:46) felt that different cultures were grounded in different “purposes” or “goals”—emotional and intellectual mainsprings in obedience to which the most ill-assorted cultural acts were shaped into a patterned whole.

As early as mid 1924, Mead and Benedict had engaged in “enthusiastic discussions” of how cultures were so patterned, and these conversations had continued as Benedict developed her thesis. As Freeman (1983) observed, they had a pivotal influence on Mead’s approach to her Samoan data. As Mead also observed, however, they were crucial in shaping the theoretical framework she took to the Sepik: “My problem, which I had declared to be central to the research I was undertaking, was to study the different ways in which cultures patterned the expected behavior of males and females” (1972:196). This enthusiasm for Benedict’s paradigm had a consequence that has been largely overlooked. “Committed” to the idea that the traits of a culture were patterned, Mead was predisposed to identify the patterns *she* discerned in her data as patterns *in the data themselves*. More important yet, Benedict’s thesis contained two analytical licenses that rendered immune to counterevidence whatever pattern Mead *did* discern. In the case of the Mountain Arapesh, cultural institutions that contradicted her thesis of nonaggressive nurturance could be reinterpreted as support for it, while individuals who contradicted it could be cast as deviants.

The first of these licenses lay in Benedict’s assertion that cultures could reconcile even the most divergent

cultural traits into a coherent pattern: "Taken up by a well-integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses (Benedict 1934:46, see also 46–50, 223–230). Cannibalism would be incompatible in a society that emphasized gentleness but, in the process of integrating it with other traits, culture might transform it into an act of veneration (e.g., participating in the being of another). Cultural traits were only meaningful within the culture in which they occurred and with reference to the "purpose" toward which that culture put them. The perverse consequence for Mead's analysis was that, with some ingenuity, counterevidence in Arapesh cultural institutions for the nonaggressive, nurturant pattern she had discerned could be transformed into support for her thesis.

This license to reinterpret any and all contradictions explains the curious feeling one has, in reading *Sex and Temperament*, of gazing at an optical illusion. In *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict (1934:51–52) had located an important justification for her point of departure in gestalt (configuration) psychology, which emphasized that to understand even the simplest sense perception one had to understand the subjective framework that an individual brought to the act of perception. Optical illusions were popular vehicles for explaining and justifying the gestalt thesis. The lines and shadings that make up the two faces at one moment and the candlestick in the next remain unchanged, even as the brain switches from one interpretation to the other. With the benefit of hindsight and a more extensive and deeper anthropological knowledge of New Guinea society and culture, one has a similar experience in reading *Sex and Temperament*—the feeling that while the data *could* be viewed in this particular way, they could also just as easily be viewed in another way, yielding quite a different picture. Now, it is hardly news that ethnographic data are vulnerable to interpretative differences. The problem is that, where the Arapesh are concerned, Mead consistently exercised this interpretative license in a way that rendered them peaceful and nurturant, while disregarding other interpretative lenses that would have contradicted her thesis.

Mead claimed, for example, that the Arapesh had no offensive war magic, only protective magic to be used in case one is drawn into a fight over a pig or a woman (1937:36, 2001:21). This would seem to ignore the offensive role sorcery played in Arapesh warfare. According to Fortune, sorcery "was considered to be a weapon of terror and of offense auxiliary to all fighting" (1947:253, see also 1939:31), and his informant accounts richly document a belief that enemies could be killed on the battlefield only if sorcery were worked ahead of time on their personal belongings (e.g., 1939:34, 35, n.d.e:75, 76, n.d.h:103). In Fortune's interpretation, then, the Arapesh did have offensive war magic. Mead knew of this belief (e.g., 2001:23, 1940:437), but she chose to interpret it in a more benign light. She saw sorcery not as offensive war magic but, rather, as the Arapesh means of asserting their essential peacefulness in the face of occasional outbreaks of violence:

No Arapesh in their right mind would intentionally kill someone in a physical confrontation, so, on the occasions when someone did, sorcery was the means of displacing responsibility onto unnamed outsiders (the sorcerers), allowing people to commiserate with the killer as an act of peace rather than attack him in an act of vengeance.

Sorcery itself provides another example of Mead's interpretative license at work. As one might expect of a peaceful people, the Arapesh told Mead that they had no sorcerers, that all the sorcerers came from the distant Plains Arapesh (Mead 1932c:4, 2001:11–12; see also Fortune n.d.i:n.p., n.d.j:17). Now, local claims that "we" have no sorcerers—that it is "only the people over there" who have sorcerers—are, in themselves, dubious. I encountered the same claim in the Yangoru Boiken village of Sima even though, after a year of fieldwork, I encountered incontrovertible evidence that the village actually had at least one, if not two, sorcerers who, with the help of their kin, carefully obscured their activities from others. Anthony Forge (1970) encountered the same sentiments among the Abelam, and it would be surprising if the Plains Arapesh did not make similar claims of the Mountain Arapesh. Whatever the case, the presence of sorcerers among the Mountain Arapesh would have undermined Mead's thesis and, whether for this reason or not, she chose to take at face value Mountain Arapesh claims that sorcerers all came from the Plains.

There were also the further, inconvenient facts that sorcery could only be performed if the victim's personal belongings were delivered into the sorcerer's hands and that it was the Mountain Arapesh themselves who did most of the delivering. Given the apparent frequency with which these deliverances occurred (Mead 2001:11–12), one might presume a level of Mountain Arapesh aggression bordering on the pathological. Mead, however, interpreted things in an ingeniously different light: The Plains sorcerers themselves, *not* the guileless Mountain Arapesh, were responsible. They were the ones who induced the hapless Mountain Arapesh, against their better nature, to deliver the exuviae of covillagers, seizing on the momentary passions of the mountain people to manipulate them into committing acts they would regret for the rest of their lives (Mead 2001:11–12). "If there were no sorcerers, if they did not constantly pass back and forth, drumming up trade, fanning slight quarrels, hinting how easily a revenge might be encompassed, then, say the Arapesh, there would be no death by black magic" (Mead 2001:12).

Or consider Mead's account of Arapesh "big-men." On the surface, these members of the community were the very picture of the stamping, shouting, swaggering, loud-voiced, abusive male. In Mead's rendering (2001:25, 28, 128–129), though, this was all a self-sacrificing act. No normal Arapesh man really wanted to be a big man, to be forced to behave in so many ways that ran counter to his cultural nature. Rather, a man took on the task of big man as a civic duty, for the sake of his community:

For them he organises feasts, he gardens and hunts and raises pigs, he undertakes long journeys and establishes trade-partnerships with men of other communities, that they, his brothers and his nephews and his sons and his daughters, may have more beautiful dances, fairer masks, lovelier songs. [Mead 2001:128–129]

And so on.

Lest this depiction of the Melanesian big man as dutiful public servant seem hopelessly naive in light of contemporary conceptions of the big man as an ambitious, manipulative, political entrepreneur, it is well to remember that Mead was breaking new ground. It was Mead, not Sahlins, after all, who introduced the big man to anthropology (Lindstrom 1981), and only the harshest critic would belabor her for getting it wrong when the phenomenon was so new. Still, one can guess how she did get it wrong: Perhaps by listening to an Arapesh big man publicly declaiming all he has done for the community, grumbling perhaps that he never gets any respect for his personal sacrifices. And Mead chose to take his words at face value rather than interpret them in a more Machiavellian light as part and parcel of the suasion that political entrepreneurs routinely deploy to try and manipulate others.

The second interpretative license in Benedict's framework lay in her conception of "the deviant." Deviance was the product of ineffective or incomplete cultural moulding. Deviants were "cultural misfits," individuals "whose temperament—defined as an extra intensity of response—combined with their life situation and experience" made them stray from the culturally expected personality (Mead 1972:196; see also Benedict 1934:251–278; Mead 2001:124–149, 271–288). The idea that individual personalities can diverge from a cultural ideal is hardly controversial, but it created a second means by which Mead could nullify the impact of contrary data. If contradictory behavior could not be reinterpreted as consistent with the prevalent cultural pattern, it could be laid instead at the door of individual deviance from that pattern. Thus, among Alitoe's menfolk, there was Nyelehai, "a loud-mouthed, malicious man, who took delight in the sorcery traffic, and went up and down the countryside abusing his neighbours" (Mead 2001:136). He also beat his wives. There was Nahomen, one of the "stupid and malicious people in the society" (Mead 2001:142–143) and Yabinigi, who was "almost stone-deaf and given to running amuck" (Mead 2001:111). Among the womenfolk, there was Temos, who "quarrelled continually" and was "almost obsessive in her hostilities" (Mead 2001:135) and Amitoa, from Liwo, a "very aggressive" woman who "mocked her husband's orders" and on more than one occasion, albeit under provocation, tried to attack him with a firebrand or adze (Mead 2001:138–139).

Mead's depictions of these "deviant" personalities are well drawn. In 1991, I listened in amazement as a gathering of older Alitoeans picked through her photographs of "four deviants" (Mead 1947, plate 18a–d) and, quite unprompted, described each in much the same terms as she

had, more than 50 years earlier. The matter of concern, though, is the *number* of "deviants" Mead fingered. Of Alitoe locality's 42 married men (1947:389–395), she described eight as "deviant" in the level of their aggression and another two as mentally unstable.⁶ Leaving aside the mentally disturbed, this computes to a deviance rate of 19 percent, almost one in five. Closer inspection of the data, however, indicates an even higher rate. *All* of these deviant husbands had their primary residence in Alitoe ceremonial community rather than the locality's other three ceremonial communities, Ahalesimihi, Alipinagle, and Yapiaun (Roscoe 1994a). Given that Mead's mobility at the time was badly hampered by her injured ankle, this is much as we would expect: These other centers were all two to three kilometers away by walking track from her and Fortune's field house in Alitoe ceremonial center, two of them on the far side of a steep-walled valley. By Mead's own account, in fact, she rarely left Alitoe, so the only Mountain Arapesh personalities she met on a regular basis were those from the community associated with this center. A more accurate computation of the deviance rate, therefore, would set the eight "deviants" against the total population of 24 married, sane males in Alitoe ceremonial community, which yields a rate of 33 percent. If one in three married males deviates from a gentle, nurturant ideal, one has to question, at the very least, the efficacy of whatever socialization process supposedly disposed the Mountain Arapesh to nonaggression and, more generally, whether indeed they were unaggressive. More realistically, this proportion of aggressive individuals suggests that Arapesh socialization was not much different from male socialization among their neighbors, which stressed the need for readiness and capability in deploying violence as a means of survival against enemies (Roscoe 1996).

The point here is not that Mead was wrong in her interpretations of Mountain Arapesh attitudes, behaviors, and personalities—though, as should be clear, I believe she was. It is to illustrate how the analytical framework she brought to the field, combined with her perception that the Arapesh were less aggressive than the Mundugumor and Chambri, inclined her consistently to interpret her data in one light rather than another, to take what was very real evidence of Arapesh aggression and violence and interpret it instead as evidence of their essential peacefulness and nurturance or, failing that, as deviance from the norm.

CONCLUSION

In late 1991, in the company of two Mountain Arapesh men, Anton Badui and Justin Mai, I made a trip into the Prince Alexander peaklands to visit Alitoe locality. The expedition turned out to be a long and arduous one. In Mead and Fortune's day, the track inland had been a firm, newly cut bridle path; now, with the Arapesh having long abandoned their mountain homelands for the coast, it had become an overgrown, leach-infested quagmire. In late

afternoon, after hours of slogging, we reached the border of Alitoa locality and at last could see, perched on the end of the ridge that curved gently down and away from us, the aging coconut palms of Alitoa ceremonial center, Mead and Fortune's home so long ago.

We paused to rest and enjoy the view. Suddenly, Anton leaped up. "Jim," he exclaimed, sweeping his arm around, "this is where our ancestors used to fight Kumip!" I glanced around and noticed we were sitting at the edge of a broad ridge top covered with low secondary growth, which evidently had been one of the traditional battle grounds mentioned by Fortune. "You know," I said, "Margaret wrote that your ancestors had no warfare."

Anton was stunned. "What?" he protested. "Our ancestors had power! Our ancestors fought Kumip. Our ancestors fought Liwo. Our ancestors fought everybody!"

There was a momentary silence, and then Justin quietly interjected: "But, you know, if Margaret said our ancestors didn't have warfare, they couldn't have had warfare."

And there lies the rub. Mead's stature in Pacific anthropology and her contributions to it are profound, but the consequences of her mistakes can be just as profound. Even within anthropology, the Arapesh are still listed as a people without violence and war. Beyond anthropology, in disciplines as varied as education, sociology, psychology, and political science, the perception is even more common (e.g., Calhoun et al. 1995:270). Scholars beyond the discipline rely on Mead's findings because of her eminence in anthropology and because they are in no position to reevaluate her conclusions themselves. We are obliged, then, to correct such errors as we find and, in this particular case, we must conclude that the Mountain Arapesh were no exception to the human predicament: Violence and war were very much a part of their established tradition.

Mead's analysis of Arapesh warfare, however, also has relevance to disciplinary issues, not least recent concern with the fierceness or passivity of anthropology's "subjects" that has been ignited by the controversy over the Yanomami and their anthropological interpreters. It casts particular light, however, on Mead's construction of Samoan culture, which was later to fascinate Derek Freeman. For better or worse, Freeman's disagreement with Mead is now billed as one of the ten "great feuds in science," ranked right up alongside Urban VIII's altercations with Galileo (Hellman 1998). The Mountain Arapesh case adds a potential chapter to this saga because Ruth Benedict's vision of patterned culture shaped not only Mead's Sepik research but also, as previously noted, her Samoan work. As early as mid-1924, Mead and Benedict had become "totally committed" in their discussions to the study of cultural patterns. Through subsequent correspondence while Mead was in Samoa and, after their reunion in 1926, Mead's commitment to the perspective had deepened. As a result, the idea of culture as "personality writ large" powerfully influenced the construction of both her *Coming of Age in Samoa* and her *Social Organization of Manu'a*

(Freeman 1983:57–59, 72–75, 301–302; see also Mead 1972:195–196).

Freeman's primary interest in this relationship was to document Benedict's dual influence in buttressing Mead's commitment to cultural determinism and in supplying the Apollonian motif for her depiction of Samoan culture. As is by now well-known, he concluded that the defects he perceived in this depiction were the result of Mead's philosophical commitment to cultural determinism coupled with difficulties she encountered in the field: a lack of systematic preparation for the project; an ill-advised program of research; poor vernacular fluency; a decision to live in a European household in Manu'a; the Samoan cultural propensity for recreational duping; and the complexity of Samoan culture itself (Freeman 1983:281–293).

Maybe. But if Mead's Arapesh work is any guide, all of this misses a more fundamental issue, the dynamic that Benedict's theory of cultural gestalts lent Mead's attempts to make sense of human behavior. In later years, as Freeman (1983:288) noted, Mead continued to give "genuine credence" to her original interpretation of Samoa even as she conceded contradictions between her depiction and those of later observers (see Mead 1969:227). She speculated that perhaps cultural times in Manu'a were atypical during her visit or that the differences could be attributed to her perspective as a young woman. Being no Samoan specialist, I am unable to judge the particulars of the case myself, but I suggest the contradictions might be attributable to the same device which later persuaded Mead that the Arapesh were gentle and nonviolent—namely, the methodological trappings of Benedict's paradigm. Whatever its virtues as a theory, Benedict's supposition that cultures organize themselves according to particular gestalts had a powerful capacity for self-validation. Whatever evidence seemed to contradict the gestalt discerned by the anthropological analyst could automatically be invalidated by the further propositions that culture worked to (1) re-fashion inharmonious cultural traits to forge a new, harmonious whole and (2) transform individualists who broke from the pattern into deviants. Perhaps, then, Mead remained convinced of the rectitude of her Samoan interpretations simply because Benedict had furnished her with a methodological deutero-gestalt that worked insidiously to confirm those interpretations.

PAUL ROSCOE Department of Anthropology, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469

NOTES

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Studies and Mary Catherine Bateson generously granted access to Mead's papers, and Mary Wolfskill of the Library of Congress greatly facilitated my study of them. Ann McLean kindly granted permission to consult the Fortune archive at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, and helped me greatly in accessing it. The National Science Foundation and the Institute for Intercultural Studies supported my research in the Fortune Archive at the Turnbull Library in Wellington. An abbreviated version of the article was presented at the 2001 Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association. I am deeply grateful to these many people and institutions, but I must stress that none bears any responsibility for the viewpoints I express or the mistakes that surely remain.

1. Linguistic research divides the Arapesh language family into at least three languages: Bumbita, Muhiang, and Bukiyip (Conrad 1978). The Mountain Arapesh speak one of three Bukiyip dialects. There are very marked cultural differences among these languages and dialects and they can lead the incautious astray. Daly and Wilson (1988:150–151), for example, inappropriately use Tuzin's data on prescriptive homicide in the enormous and culturally elaborate village of Ilahita, a *Muhiang* Arapesh village some forty kilometers from Alitua, to refute the idea that the scattered, culturally unelaborated Mountain Arapesh were gentle. Suffice it to say, there is no evidence that the Mountain Arapesh practiced prescriptive homicide.

Interestingly, Mead never explained why the *Plains* Arapesh, who spoke a dialect of Bukiyip and whom she described as warlike, should differ so markedly from the *Mountain* Arapesh, who by the standards of her time could be said to belong to the same culture as the *Plains* Arapesh.

2. Fortune n.d.b:44, n.p., n.d.c:88, 133–134, 155–156, n.d.e:79, n.d.k:n.p.; Mead 1932d:n.p., 1947:248, 253, 264, 269, 274, 275, 354 n. 1, 413, 1949b:311, 2001:147–148.

3. Fortune 1939:28, 32–35, n.d.b:n.p., 7, 8, 11, 12, 17/24, 32/44, 33/45, 41, 43; n.d.c:66–77, 88, 133–138, 155–156, n.d.e:4/72, 74/46, 75, 76, 77, 79, 87–88, n.d.h:103–104; n.d.k:n.p.; Mead 1949b:309, 311, 316.

This numbering system is an attempt to deal with Fortune's assorted papers. In some cases, a typescript page has two page numbers—one which may be the original page number, and a second number when Fortune may have decided to insert a passage or page into a different manuscript. Sometimes one number is crossed out; other times it is not. In other cases, there are duplicate pages, one with one number, the other with another number. The solids are used to indicate these multiple page numbers.

4. In collating these accounts, I have attempted to err toward the conservative. I have discounted ambiguous statements about "killings" in which the informant may have meant sorcery. I have ignored injuries from stick and fist fights, which may have been a postpacification innovation (Mead 1932c:3). And I have counted as single instances any accounts by Mead and Fortune that possibly refer to the same case.

5. These include: Mead 1932c:3, 1932e:n.p., 1932f:2, 1932g:3, 1932h:239, 263. See also in her published work, in addition to the citations in note 3, Mead 1940:437, 1947:179, 180, 275 n. 1, 340 n. 6, 344, 2001:15, 128, 141–142, 145.

6. These deviants were Agilapwe, Inoman, Nahomen, Nyelehai, Ombomb, Sumali, Wabe, Yabinigi (Mead 1947:248, 2001:19, 111, 136, 137, 142–143, 146); in addition, Menyul and Yauwiyu were mentally unstable (1947:392, 395).

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