An Inner Life Explored

Ruth Benedict. Patterns of a Life. JUDITH MODELL. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1983. x, 356 pp. + plates. $25.

Judith Modell happened on Margaret Mead's book on Ruth Benedict, *An Anthropologist at Work*, ten years ago, and she has been reading, talking, and thinking about Benedict ever since. Like Benedict, Modell went to Vassar, and like her she moved from literature to anthropology, becoming eventually, as she says, "a Benedictian anthropologist." When she chose to write first a dissertation and then this book about Ruth Benedict, she obviously worried about the problem of too great an identification with her subject. But in the end she has moved beyond seeing herself in Ruth Benedict to seeing "Ruth" as, in effect, a very dear and close friend. This then is like a biography written by a close friend, but it is very different from the two books on Benedict that actually were written by a friend, Margaret Mead. In Mead's books Benedict is seen in the midst of a complicated web of personal and professional relationships. In Modell's book the emphasis is on Benedict alone, on what she was thinking and feeling, with the other persons more shadowy presences moving in and out of her life.

Modell's study reveals that it was a life both more complicated and at the same time more whole than has been generally recognized. The outline of Benedict's life (1887–1948) is well known from Mead's earlier and invaluable account: her father's death and her mother's cult of grief when Benedict was a small child, her partial deafness, the peripatetic years as she and her sister moved around the country with their schoolteacher mother, Vassar College, the long unsuccessful search to find herself in teaching, marriage, social work, dance, and writing, the discovery of anthropology when she was in her mid-30's, and then her final years as world-famous anthropologist and author of the classic books *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946). What Modell adds to the familiar story are hypotheses as to the central emotional themes in Benedict's life, which she puts forth after meticulous research and skilled literary analysis of Benedict's poetry and journals as well as her other writings. These emotional themes include a yearning for deep feeling, for ecstasy, and at the same time a need for achievement, androgynous leanings, lifelong questioning as to how one is to live as a woman and as an individual in a world full of constraints, and a commitment to teaching and to trying to make the world a better place, which belie her customary association with cultural relativism. In fact, Modell argues, cultural relativism meant for Ruth Benedict not that we cannot pass judgment on another culture, but rather that each item in a cultural inventory must be considered in the context of the whole. It was not suspension of judgment but rather fully informed judgment that she was after. The criterion that she accepted for judgment was individual happiness.

Modell is particularly good on the coming into being of *Patterns of Culture*, a book that helped to shape the worldview of a generation of Americans. In her restless years Benedict had started to write biographies of three women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, and Olive Schreiner. As an anthropologist she decided to write biographies of cultures, and she chose the pueblo (Zuni), Dobu, and Kwakiutl peoples for a complex of reasons. She wanted sharp contrasts, which they provided. (She admired Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* but wished that Woolf had included some characters of more violent temperament.) She wanted to speak to Americans about their own society, and so she chose cultures that would reflect what she disliked in American life. The Dobuans she described as prudish and suspicious, like American puritans, and the Kwakiutl seemed to represent the spirit of greed, accumulation, and encompassing ego that in American life simultaneously attracted and repelled her. The Zunis, on the other hand, she held up for America as an ideal. They practiced moderation and balance. They were self-effacing and cooperative. The three cultures also represented intimate ties in her own life: her own fieldwork in the pueblos, the Kwakiutl studies of her teacher Franz Boas, and the Dobuan work done by Reo Fortune, Margaret Mead's husband. Benedict made full use of her literary skills in writing the book, and the cultural portraits she drew are as evocative and memorable, in Modell's apt analogy, as

"Ruth Benedict at Lake Winnepesaukee with her mother, Beatrice Fulton, and her husband, Stanley Benedict." [From *Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life*; courtesy of the Vassar College Library]

the American mythic figures Paul Bunyan and Lewis Babbitt. They carried to a large audience Benedict's sense of the importance of cultural differences and at the same time her concern that an individual not be swamped by his or her culture.

This is not the definitive biography of Ruth Benedict. Another scholar may someday document more fully the influences on her and analyze more objectively her place in American science, scholarship, and public life in the 20th century. Meanwhile, however, we can be grateful for Modell's discreet probing into the mind and heart of this gifted, sensitive, and passionate woman.

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New World Ethnohistory

The Inca and the Aztec States, 1400–1800. Anthropology and History. GEORGE A. COLLIER, RENATO I. ROSALDO, and JOHN D. WIRTH, Eds. Academic Press, New York, 1982. xx, 478 pp., illus. $47. Studies in Anthropology.

In this volume a group of prominent scholars examine the Inca and Aztec states during that critical time period just prior to and immediately following the Spanish Conquest. The volume is divided into five parts. The first consists of a lone comparative analysis of the political economy of the Inca and Aztec states by Pedro Carrasco. Part 2, Aztec State Formation, contains chapters by Edward Calnek and J. Rounds. Part 3, Inca State Administration and Colonization, contains chapters by John Rowe, Catherine Julien, Craig Morris, and Franklin Pease G.Y. Part 4, The Imposition of Spanish Governance, contains chapters by Woodrow Borah, Steve Stern, and Karen Spalding. Part 5, Indigenous Culture and Consciousness, contains chapters by J. Jorge Klor de Alva, James Lockhart, Frances Karttunen, and R. Tom Zuidema.

The book begins with an introduction by George Collier on "new directions in Mesoamerican and Andean ethnohistory" in which the contributions are reviewed and some general conclusions are drawn from them. For example, Collier observes that organizational patterns of early colonial Indian groups probably reflect pre-Conquest patterns and that the Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations were not disrupted nearly as much as has been traditionally assumed. Such generalizations as these are not particularly novel, and with respect to the rationale for the book Collier simply states that it brings together new "empirical understanding" of the Inca and Aztec civilizations and their post-Conquest development and "illustrates the strategies with which anthropologists and historians have pursued the understanding."

Most of the chapters in this volume are self-contained units, each with its own data base, research focus, and worldview. Most of the authors either attempt to use the theoretical work of other social scientists as a framework for organizing their data (Rounds, Pease, Morris, and Zuidema) or make no use of an explicit theoretical framework and simply present bodies of empirical data (Rowe, Murra, Calnek, Wachtel, Julien, and Lockhart). In both cases, the presentation of the data is the exclusive goal, and ultimately no effort is made to place them in a broader perspective. Furthermore, in Collier's introduction he makes it clear that there was a feeling among the contributors that there are not enough data on the Inca and Aztec polities to permit valid generalizations or comparative statements about processes across cultures. "Willingness to generalize and compare thus makes sense to the degree that empirical understanding of these civilizations in their own terms has matured" (p. 2).

In thus electing to await the "maturation" of the empirical documentation of the Inca and Aztec civilizations, the majority of authors in this volume place themselves in the same position archeologists were in 25 years ago, and ethnographers 50 years ago. The belief that the collection of "enough" data will somehow provide answers to questions about Inca and Aztec organization, or the reactions of the Inca and Aztec people to the Spanish colonists, or the administrative practices of the Spanish harks back to Boasian historical particularism. Unfortunately, data do not speak for themselves, and the collection of data without a guiding problem orientation and outside of an explicit theoretical framework is a comparatively unproductive research strategy.

There are exceptions to the pattern of particularistic data gathering. The chapter by Spalding on "exploitation as an economic system" demonstrates most clearly the value and utility of extending one's vision beyond the confines of documents. Though Spalding focuses on one aspect of the economic system in colonial Peru—namely, the extraction of surplus by the colonial regime—she places her analysis in a much larger global and theoretical perspective. Specifically, her presentation of data on the coercive and exploitative policies of the Spanish is prefaced by a discussion of how such data will provide a more solid foundation for understanding both the evolution of the world capitalist economic system and the economic "underdevelopment" plaguing Latin America today. Spalding does state that it is time to "move beyond assertion and theoretical argument," but she does not take the regressive step of throwing out theory and generalization. She *uses* theory and broader problem orientation to guide her research and data collection.

One of the most insightful contributions in the book is Stern's lucid analysis of "judicial institutions in an exploitative society." He places his historical discussion of judicial institutions in the colonial city of Huamanga (present-day Ayacucho), Peru, in the context of a much broader debate over the role of state legal systems in either furthering the exploitation or easing the pain of oppressed populations. He argues that even though the native Indian population made extensive use of the Spanish legal system (a number of the papers point out that the aboriginal populations readily adopted and utilized Spanish laws and courts) the system as a whole was working against them:

> In short, the juridical institutions that sponsored the extractions of a colonial ruling-class also gave the natives an opening by which to constrict exploitation. . . . Making the most of the opportunity, the native entangled exploitative practices in juridical labyrinths whose final outcomes were often uncertain. In the end, the Indians' struggle for Spanish justice weakened their capacity to mount a radical challenge to the colonial structure, and thereby contributed to the dominance of a colonial elite [p. 293].

Carrasco is the only author to accept the implicit challenge of the volume title and attempt to compare the Inca and Aztec societies. In a broad overview of the political economy of the two states, he points out that there are indeed major similarities between them. In both, for example, markets play a secondary role in distributing resources and do not dictate production. There are two categories of land, that which is held and used by the peasants for their own support and that which is held by the governing body and exploited through labor services extracted from the peasants. Surplus, in the form of resources and labor, was used by the governing body for self-support, public works projects (particularly irrigation systems), and what Carrasco calls "ostentation," manifested in the elaborate religious activities of the Inca and Aztec rulers. Though acknowl-