

DÁNIEL GAZSÓ – ANDRÁS LUDÁNYI  
MARGARET MEAD'S EFFORTS  
TO INSTILL AMERICAN VALUES  
IN THE HUNGARIAN ETHNIC COMMUNITY  
OF TOLEDO<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The present paper attempts to show how the influence of an eminent social scientist, Margaret Mead, contributed to the broader “justification” of American internal national integration and foreign policy purpose at the global level. The paper approaches this issue through a micro-analysis of one American neighborhood—the so-called Birmingham community in Toledo, Ohio—and its major medium of self-definition, the weekly Hungarian-American newspaper *Toledo*. The focus of the study is provided by the personal journey of Géza Farkas, the editor of the weekly, and by the syndicated articles he selected from the writings of Margaret Mead. The period under examination is World War II and the immediate post-war years, when the United States entered the world stage as a victorious atomic superpower. The method of the study is a content analysis of Margaret Mead’s articles that appeared in *Toledo* in 1945, combined with an examination of the reasons for their favorable reception by Géza Farkas. In addition, a separate part is devoted to an overview of Margaret Mead’s anthropological framework, the understanding of which is essential for an adequate interpretation of her articles addressed to the local Hungarian community.

## Contextualization

The present study represents a joint effort by an anthropologist and a political scientist to examine how Margaret Mead attempted to influence the cultural perspectives of ethnic Hungarians in the Birmingham neighborhood of Toledo, Ohio. During the 1970s, András Ludányi encountered this topic while conducting historical background research for the documentary film *Urban Turf and Ethnic Soul*, which was broadcast by Toledo’s Public Television in 1986. During the research he consulted *Toledo*, the local Hungarian-language

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1 In writing this analysis on the linkage between American domestic and international politics through the prism of Margaret Mead’s articles in *Toledo*, we are indebted to Nóra Deák for her ability to locate the articles for us with the assistance of Zsuzsa Daczó at the U.S. Library of Congress. We are also indebted to Zsolt Szekeres for enlarging the old newsprint so that the text could become readable.

weekly edited by Géza Farkas. Decades later, he returned to the newspaper, this time focusing specifically on Margaret Mead's articles published in 1945. These writings, along with his reflections on them, were presented at the 49th Annual Conference of the American Hungarian Educators Association, held in Pécs, Hungary, from June 19 to 21, 2025.<sup>2</sup> Among the conference participants was Dániel Gázsó, whose interest in the topic was particularly sparked. It was there that the idea emerged to collaborate on a joint study offering a deeper presentation and analysis of Margaret Mead's message for Birmingham.

The weekly newspaper *Toledo* devoted a great deal of space to local news, church events in the neighborhood, and national and international developments that affected the interests and lives of people living in the community. During World War II, Géza Farkas was always committed to an unwavering loyalty to the United States and the war aims of the Allies. His writings and editorials reflected support for the neighborhood's purchases of war bonds and the naturalization of increasingly more Hungarian-Americans. He also took pride in the number of young men who volunteered for military service. These commitments constituted a direct and natural way to demonstrate one's "Americanness" for a community whose roots lay in states geopolitically linked to the Axis powers. Of course, many of these young men did not return to Birmingham, paying for their patriotism in blood. *Toledo* as well as *The (Toledo) Blade* paid tribute to their sacrifices on the obituary pages, and their names are listed on a memorial plaque on a statue in front of St. Stephen's Church in the neighborhood.

In addition, the war also had some direct unforeseen consequences for the Hungarian, Slovak, and other ethnic communities of the Birmingham neighborhood, and perhaps for all similar ethnic neighborhoods throughout the country. These consequences were not noted by Géza Farkas in his editorials or articles about developments around Consaul Street, Bogar Street, or Magyar Street in Birmingham. These developments were the extensive wartime employment of the women in industry and the changed cultural perspectives of the returning war veterans—two developments that really determined the fate of Birmingham.

In the case of the veterans, the change was due to their successful "Americanization." The military indoctrination that they received in boot camp transformed them from "Hunkies" and "Bohunks" to integrated Americans, who now felt alien in their former ethnic surroundings and wanted to be part of the new characterless suburbs that surrounded many city centers. There they could experience the sameness that their military uniforms had provided them with during the war. This transformation was also assisted by the post-war construction of highway networks that made mobility between job site and homes much easier.

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2 Further information about the 49th Annual Conference of the American Hungarian Educators Association is available at <https://ahea.net/conferences/2025-university-of-pecs-hungary/>; accessed November 20, 2025.

In the case of neighborhood housewives, Géza Farkas did not take into account the consequences of employment in the wartime industrial efforts of the United States. The extensive employment of women in wartime industries broke the bonds of “mother language,” which up to that time had been guaranteed by mothers who transmitted the Hungarian language in the home setting. Now, the monopoly of the public school and even the aggressive English teaching in St. Stephen’s Roman Catholic classrooms sacrificed the dual language skills of the next generation. (In these classrooms, the instructor sisters, although of Hungarian-American background, scolded the children who communicated in Hungarian on school property. This claim is based on one of the recorded interviews of Birmingham residents carried out by Ludányi and his Ohio Northern University students.)

Géza Farkas did not recognize these developments as a threat to the neighborhood’s survival or at least he did not reflect on it in his weekly writings. This, in combination with the publication of Margaret Mead’s syndicated columns, raises the question: Why? On the personal level, the answer is easy. Géza Farkas was the father of Michigan and Ohio Sports Hall of Fame football player “Anvil Andy” Farkas who helped the Washington Redskins to the National Football League (NFL) championship in 1942 and ended his career with the Detroit Lions in 1945. The football fame of his son made Géza Farkas a proud and unquestioning supporter of both immersion and assimilation into American life. This also happened to coincide with when Mead’s syndicated columns appeared in *Toledo*. In other words, both on the intellectual level and on the everyday level of practical and emotional developments, the momentum was towards assimilation. Margaret Mead formulated this for the neighborhood in its own trusted news source, Géza Farkas’s *Toledo*.

Margaret Mead was a complex and rather controversial figure. She was born in 1901 and raised in an intellectual family in Pennsylvania. She earned her undergraduate degree from Barnard College in 1923 and then went on to study at Columbia University, where she was influenced by Franz Boas, the father of modern anthropology, and by Ruth Benedict, Boas’s student-turned-colleague. Under their mentorship, she obtained her master’s degree in 1924 and received her Ph.D. in 1929. In her early 20s, Mead began conducting extensive ethnographic fieldwork in remote locations, studying communities such as the Samoans in the South Pacific; the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli peoples of Papua New Guinea; and the Balinese in Indonesia. Simultaneously a researcher and a public intellectual, she had a profound influence on American feminism and cultural radicalism. Drawing on her experiences in the Pacific, she showed that gender roles are culturally constructed and, therefore, changeable. This perspective challenged dominant Western ideas about sexuality and family. Her books became bestsellers, with some regarded among the most widely read works produced by anthropologists. Mead was not only popular in her own time but also played a major role in bringing cultural anthropology to the general public.

She is often referred to as the mother of American anthropology, and *Time* magazine on March 21, 1969, even called her “Mother to the World.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Mead’s work faced considerable criticism. Some, led by Derek Freeman,<sup>4</sup> accused her of portraying distant cultures in an overly idealized way, romanticizing the societies she studied, while others argued that her recommendations for changing American society placed too much emphasis on cultural determinism, offering an overly simplistic explanation of gender roles and social behavior. More will be said about Mead’s role as an anthropologist and a cultural educator in a later, separate section of the present study.

Returning to Mead’s columns, she presents her position in a series of articles that begin appearing in *Toledo* on February 16, 1945. The editor, Géza Farkas, in his introduction simply states that the newspaper will publish an article from Margaret Mead every other week, and he also explains that:

The articles will address issues related to races and nationalities, and they aim to persuade the reader that, in order to live peacefully alongside one another in the modern world, we need to adopt a new worldview and set of practices different from those of the past.<sup>5</sup>

In total, six such articles appeared in *Toledo* from February 16 to June 8, 1945. The articles are written in flawless Hungarian, but no translator is given credit. Margaret Mead was not of Hungarian origin, and we do not have information about her language skills. Yet, the articles also make references to events and places that relate to an awareness of Hungarian sensibilities, for example disputed borders or the distance between Vienna and Budapest. It is assumed that Géza Farkas or the anonymous translator inserted these into the text.

There is also a slight contradiction between her presentation to a global audience and how it relates to the Birmingham neighborhood. The contradiction is in part explained by the organization that provides Mead’s readers with a mailing address. This organization is the Common Council for American Unity (CCAU) with its headquarters in New York City. If we look at the publications and focus of this organization, it is clear that the “Unity” of the United States is its primary concern. The question is: how can this unity be achieved? The contradiction and its resolution can be understood by examining the internal changes that

3 *Time*, Vol. 93, No. 12 (March 21, 1969), available at <https://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601690321,00.html>; accessed November 20, 2025.

4 Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

5 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, February 16, 1945, p. 3. The Hungarian text of the passage quoted from Géza Farkas’s introduction is: “A cikkek a fajok és nemzetiségek problémáival fognak foglalkozni és igyekeznek az olvasót meggyőzni arról, hogy az eddigitől eltérő, újfajta világfelfogást és szokásokat kell felvenünk, ha modern világban békésen akarunk élni egymás mellett.”

took place within the leadership of the CCAU. Until 1942, Louis Adamic was the guiding spirit behind this organization and its publications. Adamic was a Slovenian-American who wrote extensively about the immigrant and the Americanization experience. His perspective was opposed to the assimilationist momentum prevalent in the campaigns of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Adamic maintained that an integrationist policy tolerant of the great diversity that immigrants brought to American shores, a pluralist perspective, would best serve the interests of American unity. After Adamic stepped down as leader of this group, the assimilationist perspective became the dominant outlook, and Margaret Mead’s syndicated articles reflect this changed commitment. Also, the prominent role of Eleanor Roosevelt emphasizes the new direction. This change in direction also reflects the liberal American justification for an American imperial global ambition. How is this the case? To find our answer to this question, let us first examine Margaret Mead’s major concerns in the articles she published in *Toledo*, and then we will take a closer look at her anthropological perspective for a deeper understanding.

## Margaret Mead’s message for Birmingham

Already in her first article, published on February 16, 1945, Mead presents her main concerns, which also reveal a contradiction that Adamic had previously been able to avoid. Adamic had argued that you do not have to change the name of your dog from Nurmi (a famous Finnish Olympic running champion) to Butch to make the dog into an American dog. In other words, you do not have to erase your former identity to become American.<sup>6</sup> Mead disagrees, arguing that:

The peoples of the world face a new task, one that has never been attempted before. In recent years, this task has become increasingly urgent. We must learn—and we must do so immediately—how to live in peace with everyone on Earth.<sup>7</sup>

6 Louis Adamic’s writings are a treasure trove for the pluralist perspective. See particularly: *Laughing in the Jungle: The Autobiography of an immigrant in America* (1932), *My America, 1928–1938* (1938), *From Many Lands* (1940), and *Nation of Nations* (1945). For a brief biographical overview of Adamic, see the entry in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Adamic>; accessed November 20, 2025.

7 Mead, op. cit. The Hungarian text is: “A világ népeire új feladat vár, amit eddig még nem próbáltak. A feladat az utolsó évek folyamán egyre sürgősebb lesz. Azt kell megtanulnunk, – és pedig azonnal – hogyan élhetünk békekészen mindenkiel a világon.” The reader should be aware that the quotations from *Toledo* have been re-translated from Hungarian to English for the present study. Bear in mind that our translation of Margaret Mead is not based on her original English text. Instead, it is based on the Hungarian translation published in *Toledo*, which itself was translated from English. This will also be the case in all of the subsequent footnotes from this weekly.

She uses the analogy of a whip, which was needed in the stagecoach era but had become useless for making a car accelerate. At this point Mead takes a leap by equating patriotism to the whip. The patriotism that leads people to sacrifice their lives for a tract of land is outdated, she argues. Mead says that those same people who faced each other in armed conflict on the European continent now live side-by-side peacefully in the USA. She concludes that:

The United States of America is a pre-school for the new world order. North European peoples live together with those of the South, Balkan tribes with the English, those of the “Far East” live in close contact with the peoples of the “Wild West.” This is a great opportunity for those Americans who were born in a foreign setting, who have lived in at least two countries, to help even those Americans to adjust flexibly whose ancestors were born here.<sup>8</sup>

This outlook—according to Mead—frees us from rigid loyalties that tie us to our city of birth, nationality, language, local community, race, or other rootedness. This American type, or freed perspective, is needed to live in peace with one another.

In her next article, published on March 9, 1945, Margaret Mead gives instructions on how this is to be achieved. She contends:

We must teach our children to feel at home everywhere in the world. This task awaits all American parents, as also in the small villages of the Hungarian lowlands, or those Americans born among the Appalachian Mountains, as also those who grew up in the alleys of Milano, or those who were raised by the universities of Boston.<sup>9</sup>

Our children are the key to our future; they must be liberated from being rooted in the past. The problem is that they learn to be isolated from others by being too proud of their own people and fearful of strangers. Mead claims that this negative socialization, this trend to isolate our communities, is a consequence of the second wave of immigrants settling in the USA. She argues that the first wave immigrants were open to change and had the courage to move out of their traditional settings and to the United States. However, they then brought over their families and relatives who wanted to continue what they had had “back home.” This meant that they created little neighborhoods or villages like in the old country and

8 Ibid. The Hungarian text is: “Az amerikai Egyesült Államok ennek az újfajta vilárendszernek valóságos előiskolája. Észak európai népek együtt laknak a déliekkel, balkáni törzsek az angolokkal, a ‘Távolkelet’ és a ‘Vad Nyugat’ népei szoros közelségben. Kiváló alkalom nyílik az idegenben született amerikaiak részére, akik legalább két országban éltek már, hogy segítsenek az amerikaiaknak, akiknek ősei is itt születtek, alkalmazkodó képességeiket kifejleszteni.”

9 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, March 9, 1945, p. 2. The Hungarian text is: “Arra kell szoktatnunk a gyermekeket, hogy mindenütt a világon otthonosan érezzék magukat. Ez a feladat vár minden amerikai szülőre, akár a magyar alföldi kis tanyán, akár az amerikai appalachi hegységben született; akár a milánói síkatorban, akár a bostoni egyetemen nevelkedett.”



thus perpetuated their isolation from others who were unlike themselves. They raised their children to fear and avoid what was unfamiliar or strange, including the food that strangers eat, drinking from cups used by others, sleeping in beds where strangers had slept, and above all making contact with men or women from these other groups, because such actions could lead to entanglements. Thus, according to Mead, they were taught to be proud of their own nationality, language, customs, and values, and to isolate themselves from or fear those who are not like them. Mead contended that this was the old world view of Europe and Asia and that it must be replaced by an American mode of nurture. She continues with the question:

What should we teach children to enable them to travel freely in any part of the world, to serve the advancing civilization?<sup>10</sup>

The content of the American perspective is tolerance and acceptance of the different peoples with whom they come into contact. They should not fear or look down on others. In fact, every opportunity they have, parents should avoid negative stereotypes and present others in a positive mode rather than as threats to be feared and avoided. This will enable the next generation to break out of the old isolationist mode and acquire the ability to free themselves from being rooted in one place, in one community. (Mead ignored the fact that racial segregation in the military and south of the Mason-Dixon line, as well as the second-rate status of Native Americans, was still the practice when she published her articles in *Toledo*.)

What makes this transformation possible is the concept of “job.” In her April 6, 1945, syndicated article, Mead presents the American workplace as the key institution for this significant change. She claims that:

The concept of “job” is an American institution, to such an extent that other languages find it difficult to translate its significance. This concept meant a new life opportunity for many immigrants whose ancestors lived in countries where people were bound to their occupations—often to the extent that it was illegal to engage in any other work. This American innovation freed people from the restrictions imposed by their ancestry, native language, their father’s trade, religious beliefs, or racial background. Whoever you were, wherever you came from, if you were mature enough, you could go out into the world to find a “job” here. And you earned it for yourself.<sup>11</sup>

10 Ibid. The Hungarian text is: “*Mire kell hát a gyermekeket nevelnünk, hogy szabadon mozoghassanak szerte a világban, a terjeszkedő civilizációt szolgálni?*”

11 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, April 6, 1945, p. 3. The Hungarian text is: “*A ‘job’ fogalma amerikai intézmény, ugyannyira, hogy sok nyelv meg is kísérli, hogy lefordítsa. Ez a fogalom, új életet jelentett sok bevándorló számára, akinek elődei olyan országokban éltek, ahol az emberek kötve voltak foglalkozásukhoz, gyakran olyan mértékben, hogy törvénybe ütközött mással foglalkozniok. Ez az amerikai találmány felszabadította az embereket a korlátozások alól, a melyeket származásuk, anyanyelvük, apjuk foglalkozása, vallási meggyőződésük, vagy faji hozzátartozásuk állított fel. Bárki vagy is, bárhol jöttél is, ha elég érett voltál hozzá, itt kimehettél a világba ‘jobot’ keresni. És magad szerzed magadnak.*”

This was very different from how work was accomplished on the “old continent” (Europe or Asia). In these former settings, individuals generally inherited what they did for a living. They were stuck in their caste or class status, and their “place” in society was determined for them by their guild and even justified for them by religion or social custom. In America, people were freed from this rigid stratification by the frontier experience, which demanded flexibility on the part of the settlers. The pioneers had to learn how to do everything from farming and animal husbandry, to carpentering, lumbering, and clearing land, to hunting and defending their own homestead. All jobs, all work, was important, and it was not based on a status hierarchy. It was a good job if it provided good pay and if it was something you chose and preferred to do. Thus, one’s “job” was not tied to inherited position, race, religion, or nationality but to performance. This democratizing role of work transcended all commitments to traditional ways and also tended to overcome isolation and rootedness.

In her column on April 13, 1945, Mead reveals that our loyalties to our traditional communities or cultural identities can lead to contradictions in society, which should be a concern for national unity on a grand scale. In the subtitle of her article, she contends that the concept of patriotism must be made more expansive and diluted. Mead’s introductory paragraph states:

We who have emigrated to the United States have traded our narrow patriotism for a more inclusive one. In the old country our patriotism frequently did not mean more than attachment to a particular region or village. [...] But life in America has taught us to get to know others who like us are just as committed to freedom and democracy.<sup>12</sup>

This is a more inclusive patriotism. The clothes we wear are now a reflection of our jobs or occupations and not of our nationality, religion, or place of birth. Moreover, this is how it should be not just in America but in the world at large.

Unfortunately, this broader concept of patriotism, or national feeling, is frequently subverted by the narrow perspective of our former religious or nationality loyalties, according to Mead. For example, she points to the commitment of individuals who harbor negative feelings about the injustices of past border changes in Europe (i.e., the Treaty of Trianon) rather than expressing concern for world peace. Moreover, sometimes these ossified perspectives undermine one’s ability to serve a higher goal or loyalty. Thus, our loyalty to our

12 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, April 13, 1945, p. 3. The Hungarian text is: “*Mi, akik az Egyesült Államokba vándoroltunk, a szűkebbkörű hazafiságot egy tágabbal cseréltük fel. Az óhazában a hazafiság gyakran nem jelentett mást, mint u. n. lokálpatriotizmust, ragaszkodást egy bizonyos vidékhez, vagy faluhoz. [...] Az Amerikában való élet megtanított arra, hogy másokkal is megismerkedjünk, akik ugyanennek a hazának a hívei és éppen úgy szeretik a szabadságot és a demokráciát, mint mi.*”

old country becomes an obstacle to becoming a part of one unified American society and may hinder our ability to live in peace in “one world.” The conclusion is that American patriotism, this higher level of patriotism, is the road to world peace.

For whatever reason, in the month of May, Géza Farkas did not publish any Margaret Mead articles. However, in June, two articles were published with a somewhat different emphasis. The articles’ attention shifts to how to implement this grand American patriotism at the local level, in the neighborhood itself. Both the June 1st and the June 8th articles have the following heading: “When We Speak About Others.” In addition to this, the June 1st article also has a subtitle: “Level of Existence and Prejudice.” In a somewhat preachy fashion, Mead points out that immigrants who were “greenhorns” just 20 years ago are now judgmental of others who live in overcrowded housing arrangements under ghetto conditions with health problems and higher crime rates. Instead of labeling these peoples as dirty and primitive, society should look for remedies to raise them to the higher standards of American society. This will provide a setting which in true American fashion will enable everyone to live where they want to live. In other words, people should not be blocked from moving into a neighborhood because of their race, religion, or nationality. Mead proposes self-reflection grounded in three questions as a response to prejudice:

What kind of way of life do we make possible for them? Do we allow them to live where they wish? Do we educate them about what constitutes a proper way of life toward which they should aspire? Only if we can provide satisfactory answers to all three questions—and in truth, we cannot—may we pass judgment on them.<sup>13</sup>

This argument may have been presented at this time in Birmingham, because an urban development project was planned just one block from St. Stephen’s Roman Catholic Church and Calvin United Church (Magyar Református Egyház), a project that would have diluted the neighborhood’s Central European ethnic character by introducing a welfare housing component. However, this issue is not raised in the weekly.

The June 8th article by Mead carries this focus one step further. She contends that we continue to refer negatively to others on the basis of what we have heard from family and friends about them. These negative stereotypes must be eliminated from our conversations, because they perpetuate confrontations and stand in the way of peaceful coexistence. Generally, these negative opinions are expressed in backyard gatherings or similar informal

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13 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, June 1, 1945, p. 3. The Hungarian text is: “Miféle életmódot teszünk nekik lehetővé? Megengedjük-e, hogy ott lakjanak, ahol akarnak? Felvilágosítjuk-e őket arról, hogy mi a helyes életmód, amire törekedniük kell? Csak ha mind a három kérdésre kielégítő feleletet tudunk adni – pedig ahogy tudunk – ítélkezhetünk felettük.”

social get-togethers. In this context, Mead instructs us on how we should counter such a negative transmission of values. She argues that, rather than directly confronting our hosts or friends about their biased views, we should instead set an example by referring to the group in question in a respectful way. She also instructs us to always imagine if a member of the discussed group is present, as this will help us avoid derogatory or insulting references. Finally, Mead also provides some insight into the positive and negative designation of groups in our society. For example, she states that every component of our society has preferred and less preferred designations. The American Negro population prefers to be designated as “Negro-American;” more recently, this has changed to “Afro-American,” while other terms are considered offensive. The Spanish speaking inhabitants prefer to be designated by their nationality as Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, or Uruguayans rather than as South American. This designated name sensitivity has also become more significant for some European immigrants following the war. Since World War II, many prefer to be called Americans of European origin.

In this exposition, Margaret Mead really establishes the foundations of “political correctness.”

Enacting laws against discrimination is not sufficient. The way people treat one another in social settings, and the manner of conversation itself, must also change. Only in this way can we win the struggle for the liberation of humanity on all fronts.<sup>14</sup>

She presents this transformation as the proper and peaceful American mode of human interaction, despite the contradictions evident in contemporary American practices toward former slaves and the Native American population. Conforming to the new world view means first of all giving up your attachment to the Birmingham community, to ethnic identity, and to your Magyar language, and becoming immersed in the American politically correct perspective, which is this higher level of patriotism demanded by the unity of the United States. In other words, this process entails abandoning your rootedness to local loyalties.

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14 Margaret Mead, “Alkalmazkodjunk az új világfelfogáshoz” [We Should Conform to the New Global Perspectives], *Toledo*, June 8, 1945, p. 3. The Hungarian text is: “Törvényt hozni a megkülönböztetések ellen, nem elégséges. Kell, hogy a társaságban való bánásmód, a társalgás módja is megváltozzék. Csak így nyerhetjük meg az emberiség felszabadítására indított harcot, minden vonalon.”

## Margaret Mead: The Making of Modern Anthropology

In order to understand Margaret Mead's anthropology and to interpret her columns published in 1945 in the Hungarian weekly *Toledo*, edited by Géza Farkas, it is necessary to situate her within the history of the discipline and to become more closely acquainted with her work. This is no small undertaking, as Mead lived during a crucial period in the development of anthropology and was one of the most influential figures of the second generation of modern American anthropologists. Her body of work is both extensive and diverse, spanning numerous topics and approaches that have left a lasting impact on the field. Given the scope of this paper and the reader's patience, we will focus on summarizing the key developments in the discipline as well as those aspects of Mead's work that are most relevant to our topic.

### *Background: from unilineal evolutionism to cultural relativism*

In the 19th century, the dominant approach to the study of society and culture was evolutionary. It was assumed that the development of human societies was governed by universal laws that could be uncovered through comparative analysis. However, the knowledge necessary for such comparisons was rarely gathered directly. Questionnaires were often sent to the communities under study via missionaries and colonial officials, a practice that later earned this approach the label "armchair anthropology."

According to a widely cited anecdote in academic circles, someone once asked James George Frazer—one of the last representatives of early British anthropology and the author of the iconic work *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890)—whether he had ever met any of the "savages" he described in his books. He reportedly replied, "God forbid!"<sup>15</sup>

In the unilineal evolutionist framework, different cultures—whether uncovered by archaeologists or described by ethnographers—were seen as progressing along a single path, with the ultimate stage represented by the dominant Western civilizations, complete with their distinctive social and technological achievements. This evolutionary hierarchy had both a highest and a lowest rank. The major breakthrough, or paradigm shift, came in the early 20th century when some researchers "rose from their armchairs" and visited those indigenous communities previously ranked at the bottom of social development, considered the most "primitive."

15 János Bali and Lajos Boglár, "A kulturális antropológia története dióhéjban" [The History of Cultural Anthropology in a Nutshell], in *A tükör két oldala: bevezetés a kulturális antropológiába*, eds. Lajos Boglár and Richard Papp (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2007), 19–32, 22.

In Britain, the new trends are primarily associated with the work of Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Many believe that anthropology in the modern sense began in 1914 on the Trobriand Islands.<sup>16</sup> The Polish-born Malinowski conducted fieldwork there on behalf of the London School of Economics. He set out in 1914 to study the people of the Trobriand Islands. Due to the outbreak and prolongation of World War I, he remained on the islands—isolated from the global turmoil at the time—for nearly half a decade. He became accustomed to the exotic environment, learned the local language, and in the course of studying and interpreting their culture, developed what may be anthropology's most defining method: participant observation. Malinowski and his followers came to realize that culture is not merely a collection of isolated elements but an interconnected, organic whole, in which the parts are necessarily related. Within this cultural organization, each institution has a specific role that contributes to the persistence of the system (function), and the parts exhibit a defined, clearly recognizable arrangement (structure). All of this serves the broader purpose of sustaining life. In this sense, culture is a system for fulfilling human needs—this is the basis of so-called cultural functionalism.

In America, following the turn of the century, the interpretation of culture also changed radically. However, the principle that creates, shapes, and defines the essence of culture was not seen here in the bodily needs of the individual but in a motive arising from the human psyche, which is expressed in behavior. From this perspective, culture is nothing other than a complex system of various forms of behavior. The renewed British approach to anthropology was generally called social anthropology, while the American school was called cultural anthropology.<sup>17</sup> Key figures in establishing the latter were Franz Boas and his students, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead.

Largely because of the prestige of Boas, and in part because research funding was more readily available in the United States, American anthropology quickly became a larger and more established discipline than its European counterpart. When the American Anthropological Association was founded in 1906, it already had 175 members, while by 1939 the entire British Empire counted only about 20 professional anthropologists. France followed a different path: its highly centralized academic system fostered an elite intellectual circle in Paris, where anthropologists worked closely with scholars from other disciplines. French anthropology was in a sense both the most open minded and the most elitist.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Raymond Firth, ed., *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Works of Bronislaw Malinowski* (London: Routledge, 1957).

17 Edmund Leach, *Social Anthropology* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1982).

18 Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

While many—as we mentioned earlier—link the emergence of anthropology as a discipline to Malinowski, others connect it to the 1911 publication of Boas's book *The Mind of Primitive Man*.<sup>19</sup> Franz Boas was born in Germany and initially oriented himself toward the natural sciences. In 1883, he traveled to Baffin Island near Greenland to study the composition of seawater under Arctic conditions. During his geological expedition, he became more closely acquainted with the Inuit natives. During the year he spent with them, Boas realized that these people were by no means as undeveloped as the recognized anthropologists of the time claimed, and in fact, some of their tools performed even better in harsh weather conditions than the equipment brought from Europe. Boas believed that the underestimation of the Inuit stemmed from the superficiality of the comparative method underlying cultural evolutionism. His experiences on Baffin Island led him to the conclusion that similar traits, cultural behavior patterns, and practices occurring in different societies could have developed for entirely different reasons. In his own words:

[...] the same ethnical phenomenon may develop from different sources. The simpler the observed fact, the more likely it is that it may have developed from one source here, from another there.<sup>20</sup>

This observation directed attention from cultural similarities to cultural differences, marking the beginning of the development of historical particularism. This new approach challenged the general and universal conclusions drawn from comparative analyses. Boas encouraged his contemporaries, rather than trying to prove supposed parallels between culturally distant phenomena, to focus on regional specificities by tracing the origins of customs and behavioral patterns to the histories of societies under study.

After his Arctic mission, Boas worked for a while at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and then, with his wife, moved to the United States. In 1899, he became a professor of anthropology at Columbia University, where he remained for the rest of his career. His fieldwork among the Inuit and later the Kwakiutl reinforced his conviction that the common view of human development was fundamentally mistaken. In 1910, Boas initiated a series of lectures titled *The Mind of Primitive Man*. These lectures provided the foundation for the aforementioned book of the same title, published in 1911, which established the principles of his approach: historical particularism. The volume was highly influential in its time. Due to its anti-racist conclusions, it was banned in Germany following Hitler's rise to power.

19 Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, and Peter N. Peregrine, *Anthropology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005).

20 Franz Boas, "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology" (paper read at the meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Buffalo, on December 18, 1896), in Paul Bohannon and Mark Glazer eds. *High Points in Anthropology* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 84–91, 88.

Franz Boas made it clear that neither the Inuit, the Kwakiutl, nor any other people represent early stages of Western culture; rather, they followed entirely distinct developmental paths. Human cultures do not share a single, universal history. The culture of each society can only be understood in the context of its own natural and environmental conditions. The concept of historical particularism fundamentally contradicted unilineal evolutionism and the comparative research method on which it relied. Boas's students and other followers further developed this new approach. Later generations referred to it as cultural relativism, which came to be one of the most fundamental principles of modern cultural anthropology. Boas himself perhaps refrained from using this term, fearing that "relativism" might be conflated with philosophical or moral relativism, as if it implied that "everything is equally good and nothing can be judged." In contrast, cultural relativism means that cultures cannot be ranked; there is no better or worse culture, and no hierarchy can be scientifically established between them. Every culture, including the civilization that produces the anthropologist and the field under study, must be regarded as equal. This also implies that the relationship between the researcher and the studied people should be one of equality. Thus, "armchair anthropology" essentially came to an end.

By the early 1930s, the first schools of modern anthropology were firmly established in London, New York, and Paris. Within a few decades, the evolutionary anthropology of Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and others had, to a large extent, gathered a thick layer of dust. The methodological, theoretical, and institutional foundations of the revitalized discipline had been laid. Nevertheless, the undisputed center of American anthropology remained New York City, at Columbia University, where, following Boas's death in 1942, his students took up the baton. One of the most prominent figures of this second generation was Margaret Mead.

### *Margaret Mead's anthropology*

Unlike Boas and many other first-generation anthropologists, Mead was not an immigrant to the United States. She was born and raised there. The ideas and values of American society had a strong influence on her, and later even became the subject of her study. She conducted fieldwork in distant, small communities, yet used the insights gained from these studies to reflect on her own society. Drawing on these observations, she developed social critiques addressing issues such as the role of women, child-rearing practices, and sexual morality.

Like many of Boas's students, Mead paid little attention in her research to the political and economic issues that were central to British structural-functionalist anthropology,

focusing instead on topics closer to psychology—such as personality, emotions, enculturation, and gender roles—which were less emphasized by their British counterparts. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen pointed out in their book on the history of anthropology:

It was commonly held, not least in British anthropology, that emotions had nothing to do with society. Culture was a collective phenomenon, while emotions were assumed to be individual. Mead and Benedict nonetheless argued that patterns of emotion could be shared, they were also parts of culture. Although much in their work has been criticised, there can be no doubt that they took the first effective steps towards establishing psychological anthropology as a recognised anthropological sub-field.<sup>21</sup>

Margaret Mead devoted a great deal of time to ethnographic fieldwork. She embarked on her first expedition in 1925, shortly after earning her master's degree. With the support of Franz Boas, she obtained a National Research Council fellowship at the young age of 23, which enabled her to travel to the Samoan Islands. Her primary interest was whether adolescence was universally a traumatic and stressful period due to biological factors, or whether the experience of adolescence depended on cultural upbringing. After spending approximately nine months among the Samoans, Mead concluded that adolescence was not a particularly stressful time for girls there, as their cultural patterns differed significantly from those in the United States.

Mead published her findings in 1928 in the book *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*.<sup>22</sup> This study may have been the first Malinowskian, participant-observation-based fieldwork leading to a holistic monograph carried out by an American anthropologist.<sup>23</sup> The book quickly became tremendously popular. It was translated into multiple languages and brought Mead widespread fame. One reason for its popularity was that she included two chapters that directly addressed the implications of her findings for child-rearing practices in the United States. Despite its success, *Coming of Age in Samoa* has faced several criticisms over the years. Mead was accused of idealizing Samoan life and downplaying evidence that contradicted her main argument. Even the book's cover suggested exotic and romantic content, depicting two young lovers holding hands under a moonlit coconut tree.

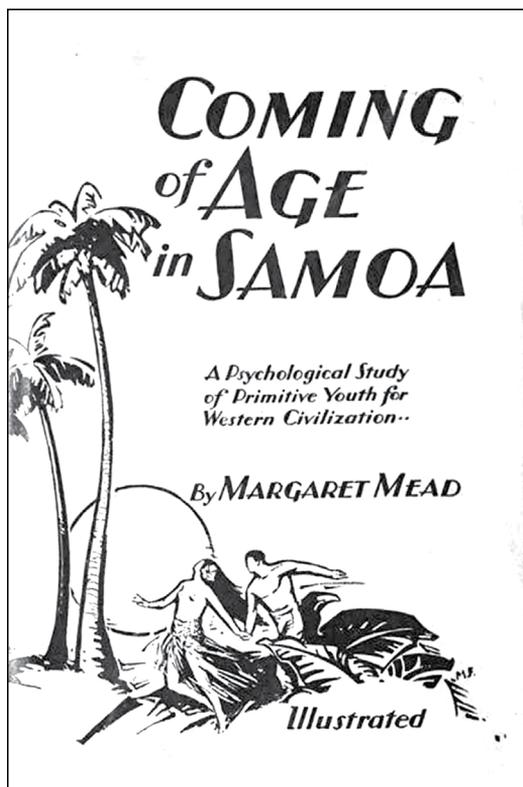
21 Eriksen and Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology*, 77.

22 Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978 [1928]).

23 Sydel Silverman, "The United States," in *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French and American Anthropology*, eds. Fredrik Barth, Andre Gingrich, Robert Parkin, and Sydel Silverman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 257–348.

Concerning her marital life, Mead was married three times. Her first marriage, during her student years, was to archaeologist Luther Cressman, whom she divorced in 1928. With her second husband, Reo Fortune, she conducted joint ethnographic fieldwork in New Guinea in the early 1930s, where they studied the relationship between gender and temperament among the Tchambuli. Her third husband was Gregory Bateson, whom she married in Singapore in 1936. Together, they conducted fieldwork on the island of Bali, analyzing the body language of the local population. During this research, they used a camera for documentation, which was highly innovative at the time.<sup>24</sup> Bateson and Mead had one child, Mary Catherine Bateson, born in 1939. She also became an anthropologist and later wrote a book about her parents' lives, titled *With a Daughter's Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 2: Cover of Margaret Mead's first book



Mead's interest was not only in understanding how psychological factors shape behavior within different societies but also—and above all—in exploring how psychological dispositions and individual temperaments develop. She addressed this question through a concept of broad-based upbringing, which in this context cannot be narrowly reduced to the mere transmission of knowledge and behavioral norms. Rather, it should be understood as the sum of all influences affecting an individual during their formative period and, through the essentially similar development of many individuals, contributing to the formation and persistence of the distinctive cultural patterns. Thus, Mead studied the process of enculturation (i.e., the process through which a child grows into their culture and learns, accepts, and internalizes its forms, values, and behavioral norms, unconsciously making them their own).

24 Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York, NY: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1942).

25 Mary Catherine Bateson, *With a Daughter's Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson* (New York, NY: Harper, 1984).

Mead also interpreted differences between cultures from this perspective, explaining cultural diversity in terms of the socially varying systems of upbringing and enculturation. Her works frequently include detailed descriptions of the relationships between infants or young children and their parents, from which she drew conclusions about the society under study. For example, in her book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, which summarizes her research in New Guinea, she reports that Arapesh children are always breastfed when they cry and typically sleep closely attached to their mothers, thereby experiencing constant security and warmth. As a result, Arapesh society is peaceful, calm, largely free of major conflicts, and oriented toward cooperation. In contrast, for Mundugumor children, debates about whether to kill them occur even before birth, and if they are allowed to live, they are exposed from birth to influences that foster alienating egoism. Consequently, Mundugumor people tend to be less cooperative.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Mead did not merely describe and interpret the cultural patterns of behavior she observed; she also sought to improve them. Her reform-oriented ambitions were articulated primarily in relation to gender roles and child-rearing practices in American society. Her works conveyed to young Americans that there were multiple ways of addressing the challenges of life and, to young American women in particular, that gender roles were not fixed but open to transformation. Mead aimed to liberate her compatriots from social inhibitions within the framework of American society, proposing the reform of cultural upbringing and child-rearing practices as the primary means of achieving this goal.

Mead summarized her principal findings on the relationship between the two sexes in *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*, first published in 1949. In this book, she examined North American social arrangements in detail, comparing them with the tribal cultures she had studied in the Pacific. As her final conclusion, she argued from a profoundly humanist yet idealistic perspective that:

We can build a whole society only by using both the gifts special to each sex and those shared by both sexes—by using the gifts of the whole of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1980 [1935]).

27 Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1975 [1949]), 384.

## Conclusion

The question is: why did Margaret Mead, a leading advocate of cultural relativism, advise ethnic Hungarians living in the United States to assimilate into the dominant society around them?

At first glance, one might assume that she set aside her fundamental anthropological approach—developed as an extension of Boas's historical particularism and applied with exemplary rigor to the tribal cultures she studied—when considering European immigrants in her own country. Reading her recommendations to local Hungarians in the *Toledo* weekly, it seems as if she had momentarily settled into the “armchair of the evolutionists,” as if she too were blinded by the preconceptions of her own cultural context—in this case, the American “melting pot” principle. She encouraged Hungarians to give up their linguistic and cultural heritage if they wished to succeed in American society.

Yet, knowing Mead's work, one cannot help but feel that something more is at stake. As previously noted, Mead considered certain behavioral patterns—especially those relating to gender roles—outdated. She believed that these patterns could be changed, specifically through reforming upbringing and the transmission of behavioral norms. For this purpose, she regarded American society as the most suitable context for such transformation. As she puts it in *Male and Female*:

[...] American homes, however strikingly different, are alike in ways that homes as different can seldom be said to be alike in Europe. For the American family is oriented towards the future, towards what the children may become, not towards the perpetuation of the past or the stabilization of the present. [...] Where each little village, each separate caste or dialect group, in Europe or Asia has been standardized by the experience of the past, faultlessly transmitted to each new generation, the people of America, North and South, East and West, are being standardized by the future, by the houses all hope to live in, not by the houses where they were born, by the way they hope their wives will look, not by the folds of Mother's skirt in which they hid their faces.<sup>28</sup>

In the same volume, Mead also points out that this forward-looking attitude—the constant striving for self-realization that is characteristic of modern American society—can make everyday life particularly difficult, especially for those who retain different cultural roots. In her own words:

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28 Ibid., 252–254.

The old perfectly realizable Puritan imperative for the moment, “Work, save, deny the flesh,” has shifted to a set of unrealizable imperatives for the future, “Be happy, be fulfilled, be the ideal.” It is very difficult to live all one’s life in way for which one has not been actually prepared, to move in relationships never fully experienced in childhood [...]. It is so difficult, especially for new Americans whose parents or grandparents came as strangers to these shores [...].<sup>29</sup>

Mead most likely classified Hungarians living in her country as part of the “new Americans,” and she may have believed that, first and foremost, these communities needed to assimilate into the American mainstream to facilitate changes in outdated behavioral patterns, looking toward the future.

What are the conclusions we can arrive at as the objectives of the Mead articles? First of all her objective is to break down loyalty to outdated national loyalties, to rootedness, which is an obstacle to a higher American patriotism and “unity.” This is the domestic objective. However, she also talks about global peace. Although she does not state this directly, on the international level this justifies blaming the nationalism of individual nations for the outbreak of wars, rather than the political conflicts between major powers and their imperial objectives. This then becomes in part the justification for creating a new international order through the United Nations run by the major powers in the Security Council but guided by the high ideals of American patriotism. This role on the global level foreshadowed certain consequences, including a more assertive presence of the United States in almost every part of the world. Of course, Margaret Mead cannot be blamed for this; she has already passed to a different stage of existence.

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29 Ibid., 257.

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