Zunia Henry: An incidental anthropologist in the Chaco

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This article reconstructs the anthropological legacy of Zunia Henry (1903-1998), an "incidental anthropologist" who transitioned from a musical career to become a pioneer of Gran Chaco ethnography. Despite lacking formal academic training, Zunia Henry was among the first women to undertake an extended field stay (1936-1937) among the Indigenous peoples of Formosa, Argentina. Collaborating with her husband, Jules Henry, she made significant contributions to the then-emerging intersection of psychology and anthropology. By synthesizing scarce biographical data, archival information, and ethnographic records, this study highlights Zunia Henry's methodological innovations—specifically her adaptation of David Levy's "doll play" technique. Through a "free play" approach using custom-made doll sets, she managed to move beyond clinical therapy to document Indigenous children's behavior within their specific cultural contexts. Her research provided empirical evidence of sibling rivalry as a potential human universal while demonstrating that its manifestations are culturally contingent. Thus, by drawing on archival correspondence and field publications, this article aims at rescuing Zunia Henry from historical obscurity, establishing her as a highly competent ethnographer whose work remains a foundational, yet overlooked, contribution to South American lowland anthropology. [Keywords: Zunia Henry, women anthropologists, Pilagá, Gran Chaco, Argentina, psychological anthropology, doll play.]

Zunia Henry : une anthropologue accidentelle dans le Chaco. Cet article reconstitue l'héritage anthropologique de Zunia Henry (1903-1998), « anthropologue accidentelle » qui, après une carrière musicale, est devenue une pionnière de l'ethnographie du Gran Chaco. Bien que dépourvue de formation académique classique, Zunia Henry fut l'une des premières femmes à effectuer un séjour de terrain prolongé (1936-1937) parmi les peuples autochtones de Formosa, en Argentine. En collaboration avec son mari, Jules Henry, elle a apporté des contributions significatives à l'intersection alors émergente de la psychologie et de l'anthropologie. En synthétisant des

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données biographiques lacunaires et des archives ethnographiques, cette étude met en lumière les innovations méthodologiques de Zunia Henry – plus précisément son adaptation de la technique du « jeu de poupées » *(doll play)* de David Levy. À travers une approche de « jeu libre » utilisant des poupées spécialement confectionnées, elle a réussi à dépasser le cadre de la thérapie clinique pour documenter le comportement des enfants autochtones au sein de leurs contextes culturels spécifiques. Ses recherches ont fourni des preuves empiriques de la rivalité fraternelle en tant que potentiel universel humain, tout en démontrant que ses manifestations sont culturellement contingentes. Ainsi, en s'appuyant sur des correspondances d'archives et des publications de terrain, cet article vise à sortir Zunia Henry de l'oubli, en mettant en lumière son œuvre d'ethnographe, qui demeure une contribution fondamentale, bien que méconnue, à l'anthropologie des basses terres d'Amérique du Sud. [Mots-clés : Zunia Henry, femmes anthropologues, Pilagá, Gran Chaco, Argentine, anthropologie psychologique, jeu de poupées.]

Zunia Henry: una antropóloga accidental en el Chaco. Este artículo reconstruye el legado antropológico de Zunia Henry (1903-1998), una "antropóloga accidental" que transitó desde una carrera musical hasta convertirse en pionera de la etnografía del Gran Chaco. A pesar de carecer de formación académica formal, Henry fue una de las primeras mujeres en realizar una estancia de campo prolongada (1936-1937) entre los pueblos indígenas de Formosa, Argentina. En colaboración con su esposo, Jules Henry, realizó aportes significativos a la entonces emergente intersección entre la psicología y la antropología. Mediante la síntesis de datos biográficos dispersos, material de archivo y registros etnográficos, este estudio destaca las innovaciones metodológicas de Zunia Henry; específicamente, su adaptación de la técnica de "juego con muñecas" *(doll play)* del psicólogo David Levy. A través de un enfoque de "juego libre" con sets de muñecas fabricados a medida, Zunia Henry logró trascender la terapia clínica para documentar el comportamiento de los niños indígenas dentro de sus contextos culturales específicos. Su investigación proporcionó evidencia empírica de la rivalidad entre hermanos como un potencial universal humano, demostrando a su vez que sus manifestaciones están supeditadas a lo cultural. De este modo, al recurrir a correspondencia de archivo y publicaciones de campo, este artículo se propone rescatar a Zunia Henry de su invisibilización histórica, posicionándola como una etnógrafa altamente competente cuya obra constituye una contribución fundamental, aunque soslayada, a la antropología de las tierras bajas sudamericanas. [Palabras clave: Zunia Henry, antropólogas, Pilagá, Gran Chaco, Argentina, antropología psicológica, juego de muñecas.]

A forgotten pioneer

Investigations into the history of anthropology in the Gran Chaco rarely reference Jules Henry, who conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the region during the 1930s. Similarly, there is little mention of his wife, Zunia Henry, who accompanied him in the field and made her own contributions to the study of the region's Indigenous cultures (see, e.g., Lowrey, Combès,

and Villar 2009). Consequently, this article aims to reconstruct her virtually unknown anthropological legacy while rescuing her from historical obscurity.

Despite not being an academic ethnographer, Zunia Henry was among the first women to undertake a prolonged field stay among a lowland South American people, the Pilagá (Guaycurú) of Laguna de los Pájaros, Formosa, Argentina. In collaboration with her husband, she subsequently published a series of scholarly works in a field then largely unexplored by Chaco ethnography: the intersection of psychology and anthropology (Henry and Henry 1940, 1942, 1974 [1944]; Schachtel, Henry, and Henry 1942). This is all the more significant given that Jules and Zunia's studies were among the very first to be conducted according to the standards of modern anthropology. However, reconstructing Zunia's life and anthropological impact is complex. After emigrating from Russia and training as a classical pianist and music teacher, her entry into anthropology was largely sparked by her husband's career. During the 1930s, Columbia University served as a strategic anthropological hub where disciples of Franz Boas—including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Edward Sapir, and Alfred Kroeber—advanced an ambitious research agenda. Following Jules Henry's doctoral research on the Kaingang (Xokleng) of Brazil, Boas and Benedict secured funding for an additional extended trip to South America. Alongside outstanding women scholars like Zora Neale Hurston, Ella Cara Deloria, and Ruth Landes, Zunia was encouraged to contribute to the growing field of ethnography (Andreson 2021; Franceschi 2014; King 2019). Boas and Benedict identified a propitious opportunity for Zunia to accompany her husband, assist in his work, and perhaps conduct independent research. In this sense, Zunia Henry may be characterized as an "incidental anthropologist" whose scientific contribution occurred almost by serendipity.

This "incidental" status naturally influences the quantity and nature of the information available for reconstructing her legacy. The extant corpus includes her own publications; a rich documentary archive containing over forty field-work notebooks; correspondence with prominent figures in the North American academy; and a video oral history interview recorded on January 30, 1988, in St. Louis, Missouri. In this interview, conducted by sociologist Murray Wax and anthropologist Joan Cassell when Zunia was 85, she reflects on meeting Jules and their time in the Gran Chaco.

Zunia's Life before Anthropology

Zunia Gechtman was born in Odessa, Russia, into a wealthy Jewish family on her mother's side; her father's family, by contrast, were "very poor farm people." Zunia offered no further details regarding the timing or circumstances of her family's emigration from Russia to the United States. When queried

by the interviewers about her year of birth, she provided an unexpected response—"I don't know"—and explained:

> We came here [to the United States] and I never had a birth certificate in all my life. My father said one thing and my mother said another. My father was the one who learned English first and he took care of the records. My mother said he was wrong. My aunt, mother's sister, who knows everyone's birthday to the minute, says he is absolutely wrong. (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

The headstone marking Zunia Henry's grave—situated beside that of her husband in a St. Louis cemetery—records her birth as October 23, 1903, and her death as June 16, 1998, at the age of 95. The modest monument identifies her simply as "Zunia Henry" and concludes with the following inscription: "Her love of life and learning, her music, and her strong spirit will always be remembered."[1] This tribute serves as an apt characterization of her legacy.

From an early age, Zunia demonstrated a fearless and independent nature. She was never afraid to speak her mind, a trait she maintained throughout her long life. In her interview with Wax and Cassell, she expressed a distinct sense of pride regarding her musical lineage, noting that her mother was a singer and recalling an uncle who "played in the Czar's orchestra—a Jew in the Czar's orchestra, how good must he have been, can you imagine?" She also fondly recounted childhood piano sessions with uncles, aunts, and cousins. She pursued piano studies at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City (then known as the Institute of Musical Art). Her talent earned her a prestigious scholarship in 1931 to study at the Berlin Academy of Music under the renowned pedagogue Leonid Kreutzer (1883-1953).

Zunia returned to the United States in the early 1930s as the German political climate became increasingly hostile under the Nazi regime. In the summer of 1934, serendipity brought Zunia Gechtman and Jules Henry Blumensohn together:

> When I came back from Berlin, I was very ready to work in music. I needed to. A friend of mine, who had been a dancer … was working in some office which was misery for her. She called me and asked whether I would go on vacation with her … we found a little place advertised in Connecticut run by a Russian couple … As we got there, as we were approaching the Inn, there was a young man with a shock of black hair and a black-eyed Susan [flower] behind his ear, brown skin, sun-beaten skin, and a pair of shorts: that's it. He was playing ball with a five-year-old girl. I thought to myself, "That is an unusual man, I wonder what he's like" … That evening, Jules came up to see us … After I met him, I said: "I'll never go out with that one!" (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

1. See: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/195824651/zunia-henry/, accessed on 09/11/2026.

Later in the interview a left-leaning Zunia revealed why her early impression of Jules was unfavorable by sharing her sarcastic response to Jules' expression of gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation for its support of his research:

> The first night we met at that little Russian Inn in Connecticut, Jules was telling me that he had just come back from the Kaingang, and he was telling me that he owed it all to Rockefeller. I looked at him and said, "My God what an idiot." I said, "You don't owe anything to Rockefeller. If it hadn't been for Rockefeller, you wouldn't have to owe it to him." That was the beginning of Jules' downfall politically. (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

Six weeks later, on August 27, 1934—only two days after Jules Henry Blumensohn informed his Columbia University mentor, Ruth Benedict, that he had legally dropped the surname of his birth—Zunia and Jules were married. At this juncture, without realizing it, Zunia was taking her first steps toward becoming an anthropologist in her own right. Simultaneously, Jules stood on the threshold of a career as a left-leaning scholar—one whose convictions would later lead to accusations of communist sympathies by fellow anthropologist George Peter Murdock in 1949.[2]

Welcome to the Chaco

The Gran Chaco region, where Jules and Zunia would eventually spend over a year, is a semi-arid lowland plain in central South America covering approximately one million square kilometers across northern Argentina, eastern Bolivia, and western Paraguay. The region is home to roughly 250,000 Indigenous people representing more than twenty distinct ethnic groups, organized into six primary linguistic families (Lowrey, Combès, and Villar 2009). During the 1930s, this multiethnic landscape was shaped by the inexorable pressure of the colonizing frontier. Indigenous territories were subject to encroachment by cattle ranches, extractive enclaves, military outposts, and religious missions—a process that gained significant momentum following the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932-1935) (see, e.g., Córdoba 2016; Richard 2008).

Located in northern Argentina, the Pilagá—members of the Guaycurú linguistic family—were at that time undergoing a process of sedentarization under the Anglican missionaries belonging to the South American Missionary Society (SAMS; Córdoba 2017b, 2020; Lunt 2011; Montani 2015). The Anglican presence in the Chaco was not merely incidental but rather, as will be demonstrated,

2. Zunia's Russian heritage and the couple's shared social convictions made them easy targets for political scrutiny during the McCarthy era, and it was perhaps predictable that Murdock would take the extreme step of writing to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover on January 1, 1949, accusing Jules—amongst others—of being a communist sympathizer (for further analysis, see Price 2004, Chapter 4).

crucial for understanding the full scope and nature of the Henrys' fieldwork. In 1935, a mission for the Pilagá population—then called Misión Pilagá—was founded in Laguna de los Pájaros, on the banks of the Pilcomayo River. Misión Pilagá would ultimately become the Argentinian destination of the Henrys. Inaugurated in October 1935 at the request of the Pilagá people themselves, its primary objective was to secure protection against the incursions of both the Paraguayan army, advancing along the opposite bank of the Pilcomayo River during the Chaco War, and the Argentine army, which sought to fortify the national border against movements instigated by the conflict (Arnott 1936; Córdoba 2017b). Ultimately, Misión Pilagá was the only mission to be closed due to economic scarcity, environmental problems, and recurrent conflicts between Indigenous people, *Criollo* settlers, and the military (Córdoba 2017b). And it was also unique as the only SAMS mission led by the Scottish missionary John Arnott (**Figure 1**), a pivotal figure for understanding the development of Chacoan anthropology in the 1930s—a "man on the ground" who proved essential not only to Jules and Zunia, but also to nearly all scientists of the era traveling the region relying upon missionary infrastructure (Córdoba 2020).

The Pilagá had acquired a regional reputation for ferocity and violence—even prompting authorities to deploy aircraft with the intent of extermination (Arnott 1934, p. 492). Therefore, Arnott's strategy was to gain sufficient time to work with the community and de-escalate the seemingly inexhaustible cycle of blood-feuds between the Pilagá and the local population. Nevertheless, despite his efforts, the ensuing months and years were characterized by famine, flooding, and the extrajudicial killing of Indigenous people during clashes with the military. This fostered a burgeoning skepticism among the Pilagá regarding the mission's actual capacity to provide protection against the abuse. In this volatile context, Jules and Zunia Henry arrived in the Chaco.

The Henry-Métraux-Arnott triad

The arrival of Jules and Zunia Henry in Argentina in 1936—and their specific engagement with the Pilagá—is inextricably linked to a network defined by the Henry-Métraux-Arnott triad. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the ethnographic triangle formed by the Henrys, the Anglican missionary, and the famous anthropologist Alfred Métraux to fully understand both the scope and the limitations of their ethnographic work, as well as how they soon became entangled in a series of personal disputes, academic tensions, and veiled local grievances (Córdoba 2017a, 2020).

Anthropologist Alfred Métraux had arrived in Argentina in December 1928, settling in Tucumán, where he had been appointed to direct the recently established



Fig. 1 – John Arnott and Pilagá child, Misión Pilagá, 1939
(photo anonymous; musée du quai Branly – Jacques-Chirac, fonds Guy Métraux, PP 0204758)

Institute of Ethnology and Ethnographic Museum of the local university.[3] Métraux harbored ambitions of securing prominent standing in Americanist anthropology by establishing a museum modeled after Nordenskiöld's institution in Gothenburg. To this end, he spearheaded several archaeological and

3. Significant scholarship has emerged in recent years regarding Métraux's time in Argentina: see, e.g., Bilbao 2002; Bossert 2016; Bossert and Villar 2007; or Córdoba 2015, 2016, 2017a.

ethnographic expeditions targeting the Chiriguano and Chané of northern Argentina and southern Bolivia, the Chipaya of Carangas, and ultimately the Toba settled at Misión El Toba, where he first encountered Arnott.[4] From that point onward, and spanning several years, Métraux maintained a nearly constant correspondence with the young Scottish missionary, who served as his "man on the ground." Métraux not only solicited ethnographic data regarding the Wichí and Toba peoples from Arnott—the ethnographic data provided by Arnott's letters being exceptionally detailed (Córdoba 2020)—but also commissioned the collection of various material culture artifacts.[5] While Métraux was certainly persistent in his inquiries, he was also one of the few scholars to publicly acknowledge the missionary's contributions to his work, even including some of Arnott's illustrations in the *Handbook of South American Indians* (Steward [ed.] 1946, p. 281).[6]

It was precisely by leveraging the connection initially established by Métraux that Arnott also formed a link with Jules and Zunia Henry prior to their departure for the Argentine Chaco. Métraux and Henry met in New York sometime before March 1936.[7] By then, Jules had completed his dissertation on the Kaingang language, and had been awarded his PhD (Henry 1935). He had also been drafting papers on Kaingang culture (Henry 1941) and personality, applying for post-doctoral fellowships and searching, without success, for a job. When Jules' 1934 application to the Social Science Research Council to do additional linguistic training at the University of London and linguistic research among Indigenous peoples in northeastern Brazil fell through, Boas and Benedict saw to it that he would be supported by Columbia University with Rockefeller dollars. Métraux undoubtedly played a major role in steering the Henrys to the Pilagá. He had corresponded with Boas and Benedict for years, and he lobbied Jules directly, and in person, to conduct his next research among the Pilagá of the Argentine Chaco:

> I was extremely pleased by your letter and by your decision. I advised you so warmly to the Chaco because I knew that such an expedition would be practically

4. Notwithstanding his initial enthusiasm, bureaucratic obstacles and local political dynamics finally led to Métraux's rapid disillusionment, and after only four years he departed in pursuit of more favorable professional horizons.

5. Based on the dates of the correspondence, it is assumed that these items comprise the collection kept at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which includes over 500 Pilagá artifacts collected at Laguna de los Pájaros during 1939 donated by Métraux himself (see: https://anthro.amnh.org/collections).

6. Further exploration of the relationship between Métraux and Arnott is beyond the scope of this study (see Córdoba 2015, 2020). For a study of Métraux's essential role in the *Handbook of South American Indians*, see Krebs 2005.

7. "I would like to reiterate here what I have told you orally in New York" (A. Métraux to J. Henry, Honolulu, 3/30/1936, WUA, Series 7, Box 7, folder 16, Pilagá 002).

> convenient and scientifically profitable. Remember that you will get into a region where there are Matako, Toba, Toba-Pilagá, Chunupi, Tapiete, Choroti, Chiriguano, and Chana and none of those tribes has been studied properly. I would suggest that you concentrate on the Pilagá and the Matako, which are the most numerous tribes in Argentine territory and those which have best preserved their old culture … I am extremely happy that my unfinished work will be brought to an end by so competent an ethnologist. You are realizing one of my most ardent wishes: to see a student of Franz Boas start with a study of my poor Chaco Indians. It will secure a new future for South American ethnology. (A. Métraux to J. Henry, Honolulu, 3/30/1936, WUA, Series 7, Box 7, folder 16)

There was not much doubt that "Mrs. Jules Henry" would accompany her husband in the project:

> [Boas and Benedict] asked me if I would like to accompany him and do some field work too. I laughed and said, "I'm not an anthropologist, I'm a musician." I was a pianist, I was playing, I was teaching; life was beautiful. I had no intention of going into any field and changing my profession. It occurred to me when they asked me to do that, I told them I knew nothing about anthropology, that I had never even read a book on anthropology! All of a sudden it occurred to me as a thought that all my life I was brought up in New York City. All my life I had wondered whether somewhere in the world there was a society that was better to their people than we are. The question arose in my head—do you think this might be that society? So, at that point I told them I would go with him. Thereupon I became an anthropologist. (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

In preparation for fieldwork, Zunia undertook a rigorous and accelerated immersion in anthropological methodology and child development:

> I just took courses like crazy. I took every course that was offered in anthropology. Boas, Benedict, I took one course from Margaret [Mead]. Otto Kleinberg was kind enough to offer me his course.[8] I did a lot of that. I went to many, many clinics—well baby clinics, maternity clinics. I really was an ignoramus you know; I didn't know any of these things at all. I just honed up on anything I could. This was the preparation I gave myself. (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

It was during this period that the Henrys also came to know the American psychoanalyst David M. Levy, director of the New York Child Guidance Clinic, and the psychoanalyst responsible for introducing the Rorschach inkblot test and the concept of projective testing to American psychology (Searls 2017, Chapter 14). It would be difficult to over-estimate Levy's influence on the Henrys' field research and even the entire course of Jules Henry's career.[9]

8. A friend and colleague of Boas and Benedict at Columbia University, Otto Kleinberg was a Canadian social psychologist interested in cross-cultural social psychology.

9. David Steele (n. d.) is currently conducting an in-depth study of the life and work of Jules Henry and, in particular, the influence of psychological methodologies on his research.

Levy was particularly interested in the mother-child relationship and in sibling relations. He coined the phrase "sibling-rivalry" to describe the conflictual relationships among siblings in their competition for parental attention and affection (1937). In his therapeutic work with emotionally troubled children, he had developed a "doll play" method in which the patient was given dolls representing the mother, a younger sibling, and an older sibling and encouraged to use them to act out interactions between the three, in the hope that through this method children would be able to disclose unconscious feelings and motivations that they were unable or unwilling to voice otherwise. And Levy taught Zunia how to administer, record, and interpret "doll play" sessions as part of her preparations for fieldwork (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988). Levy also encouraged the Henrys to administer Rorschach inkblots while in the field.

The first tensions between Métraux and the Henrys emerged early in the planning stage. Although they followed the guidance of their North American mentors, an experienced Métraux almost immediately assumed a supervisory role over their ethnographic endeavor. He sent them numerous letters containing recommendations, ranging from the optimal route to Formosa to appropriate attire and requests to collect various kinds of artifacts from specific Indigenous groups. Furthermore, he provided letters of introduction to academic contacts he had established during his own tenure in Argentina.[10] He also introduced them to John Arnott, with the intention that he would facilitate their stay in the field. And he even suggested a research agenda for Zunia:

> Please ask Mrs. Henry to make for me a complete collection of Indian toys, especially of clay dolls. She can barter sweets for them and there are many curious things to be had—balls, feather ornaments, and so forth. Children use also small pots, small carrying nets, and tiny weapons. I should like to present a complete set of the toys to the Museum of the University of California. Also tell Mrs. Henry to study dances and the games of the children in the Toba missions (Sombrero Negro). They are more prevalent there than any place else and are extremely interesting. She will be able to write a complete book on the subject. (A. Métraux to J. Henry, Honolulu, 5/01/1936, WUA, Series 7, Box 7, folder 16, Pilagá f.1.3)

Concurrently, Eva Spiro—Métraux's first wife—corresponded with Zunia to offer practical advice. Her recommendations included the necessity of procuring *bombachas de gaucho* (traditional wide-legged trousers), the social requirement

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Much of the information on the Henrys' preparations for their research on the culture and psychology of Pilagá childhood in the current paper is based on his in-progress manuscript.

10. Thus, for instance, Métraux did not hesitate to claim credit for Henry's choice of fieldwork site: "I am extremely pleased to introduce Dr. Henry and his wife, who, at my inducement, are traveling to the Chaco to remain for two years. Dr. Henry is a professor of primitive linguistics at Columbia University" (A. Métraux to A. Vignati, Honolulu, 5/01/1936, WUA, Series 7, Box 7, folder 16).

to avoid wearing trousers in urban settings, and the pragmatic advantages of *alpargatas* (espadrilles) for enduring the tropical climate. She also offered Zunia advice about preparing for her work: "Since you are going to work with children and their mothers, buy many play things, particularly of those which make noise, whistles, trumpets, cheap and not too complicated." And finally, she counseled, "be careful with the water you drink too."[11]

Jules and Zunia in the field

Following the deluge of advice and suggested lines of inquiry, the Henrys finally departed by ship for Argentina in July 1936. They spent their first six weeks in Buenos Aires attending to bureaucratic requirements, purchasing supplies, and establishing contact with several of Métraux's associates. Their exchange with the Argentinian anthropologist Enrique Palavecino, in particular, seems to be characterized by a tone of jovial camaraderie—a sharp contrast to the markedly formal nature of his correspondence with Métraux.[12]

In September 1936, the Henrys finally made their way to the Chaco, notably bypassing Tucumán and thereby disregarding Métraux's recommendation. In Formosa, they settled at Misión Pilagá, founded by Arnott less than a year prior to their arrival (**Figure 2**, next page). In total, they spent fourteen months in the field, from mid-September 1936 to mid-November 1937. As they began the arduous task of learning the language and familiarizing themselves with Pilagá culture, they started working with Indigenous children and their parents as planned. Specifically, the aim was to assess whether sibling rivalry existed among the Pilagá, and if it did, how it compared with that experienced by American children Levy had treated and studied. In this, they were following a precedent set by Margaret Mead, who, a decade before, on the urging of Franz Boas, went to American Samoa to research similarities and differences in the lived experiences of American and Samoan adolescents—research that led to her groundbreaking book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).[13]

11. E. Spiro to Z. Henry, Honolulu, 4/30/1936, WUA, Series 7, Box 7, folder 16, Pilagá f. 2.4.

12. See, e.g., "My *caro* friend, cheers, and please excuse my terrible Spanish, just as I forgive you for not replying to any of the letters I sent you from Chaco" [original in Spanish], J. Henry to E. Palavecino, undated [n. p.], 5/21/1938, WUA, Series 9, Box 10, folder 6, letter 007.

13. Margaret Mead's original contributions to the anthropology of childhood and sibling relations (see, e.g., Mead 1928, 1930) predate the Henrys' research on sibling relations among the Pilagá in 1936-1937. While the Henrys were in Argentina, Mead and Gregory Bateson were conducting their famous research on childhood in Bali. For reasons unknown to us, Jules Henry rarely cited Mead's pioneering work in his writings on childhood. Nor did he credit her as influencing his work.



Fig. 2 – "Our tent in the village," Misión Pilagá, n. d.
(photo anonymous; Washington University Archives,
Jules Henry Papers, Series 9, photo nº p2-013)

As the Henrys later noted: "Since David Levy's classic work on sibling rivalry has served in great part as a theoretical orientation for our work, since he has sharply focused certain types of problem[s], and because he has developed a very precise technique for presenting the material, we have followed him in many respects" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 1). Their unique contribution involved integrating Levy's structured doll play technique with ethnographic observations of the everyday behaviors of children in their natural settings over an extended time period. As we shall see, Zunia would make significant and inspired adjustments to the doll play technique to better fit the Pilagá social and cultural landscape.

The Henrys wisely postponed conducting doll play experiments with the children and the administration of Rorschach inkblot tests pending their mastery of the language, as they realized that only then would they be in a position to appreciate the nuances of their informants' responses. Throughout the entirety of their research, indeed, a consistent hallmark of their work was the paramount importance conceded to the linguistic factor. In their view, this was a necessity

dictated by the extraordinary nature of the Pilagá language itself, and they commented frequently on the challenges they faced in gaining linguistic proficiency:

> Of course all work has to be done in Pilagá. Even at the cane fields the Spanish of the so-called interpreters wasn't worth two cents and no interpreter would give me the Spanish equivalent of a Pilagá word. They always said that the Spanish words were "no good" and that "our word is the only word." This is all quite true. The subtlety of the Pilagá word cannot be equaled either in Spanish or English. So all explanations have to be obtained in Pilagá and the faculty for explanation is rare. (J. Henry to F. Boas, Ingeniero Juárez [Argentina], 9/03/1937, APS)

Their field notebooks, as well as their correspondence with Boas and Benedict, include nuanced observations regarding sociolinguistic registers, the speech patterns of children, comparative areal connections between Pilagá and related languages (e.g., Nivaclé and Wichí), and even discussions of the linguistic classification of Theodor Koch-Grünberg.[14] The Henrys' methodological emphasis on Indigenous language significantly differentiated their research from the work of other colleagues, such as their friend Enrique Palavecino.[15]

Before Zunia went into the field, and before she embarked on her accelerated course of study in anthropology and child psychology, she had worried that she would not be of much help to Jules in the field research, given her sparse training and lack of experience. But Zunia's typed notes of field observations show her to have been a keen observer of behavior, interactions, and everyday events. She seemed to have been a natural fieldworker. The Henry archive, preserved at Washington University, contains forty-four handwritten field notebooks, some of which are marked on the cover with a "J" (for Jules), others with a "Z" (for Zunia), and several are labeled "J + Z." Of these, twelve were written entirely by Zunia, featuring field observations, drawings of Pilagá women's tattoos and facial paintings, and even musical notations (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**, next pages). Furthermore, in the majority of the photographs, she recorded the Pilagá name, age, and kinship relations of the subjects on the reverse side: for example, "Yorodaikolík and his sister Tapáñi (about eight years old) sitting on shore of the Pilcomayo River, Gran Chaco, Argentina. Property of Zunia Henry."[16]

Zunia was also responsible for typing the handwritten field notes, preparing the corresponding records for photographic images and the over 100 drawings

14. See, e.g., J. Henry to F. Boas, Ingenio San Martín (Argentina), 7/30/1937, APS.

15. Indeed, the positive rapport with Palavecino did not preclude the Henrys from discerning his professional limitations: "He is badly in need of training, for he can get none here—everything he knows about anthropological methods (that is in ethnology) he has gotten from reading—which has not been too extensive. He is a physical anthropologist as well, but knows nothing of linguistics. No one down here can give any training in it" (J. Henry to F. Boas, Buenos Aires [Argentina], 8/18/1936, APS).

16. WUA, Jules Henry Papers, Series 7, photographs-gen_09 (see **Figure 5**).

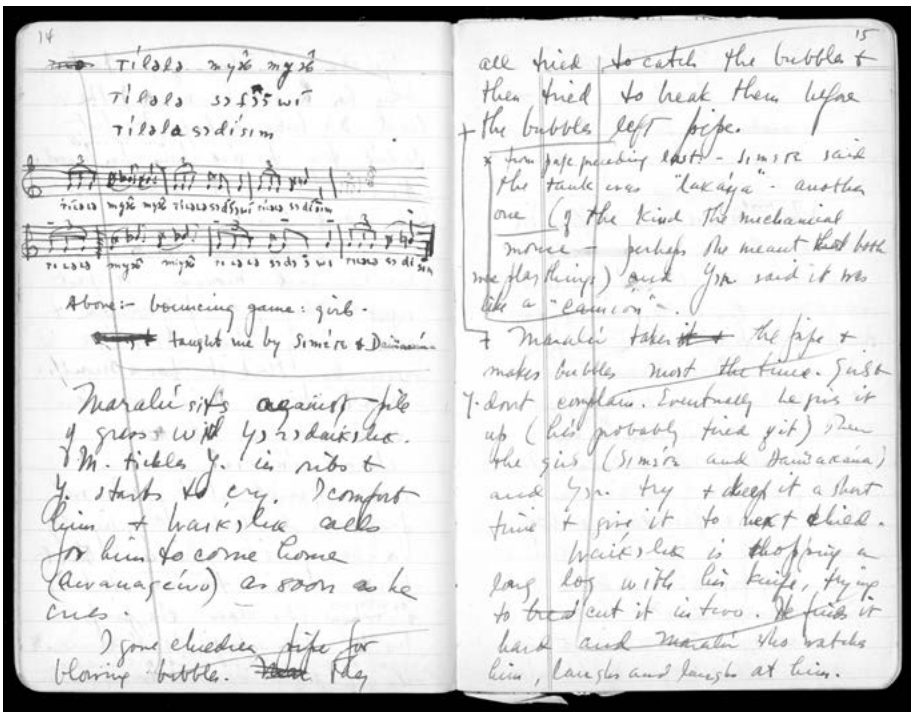


Fig. 3 – Zunia's notebook, Misión Pilagá, n. d.
(photo anonymous; Washington University Archives, Jules Henry Papers, Serie 9, box 11, folder 23, photo nº 00098-s09-b12-f31-009)

by Pilagá children collected in the field, and she was primarily responsible for carrying out doll play testing and administering Rorschach inkblot tests. All the evidence indicates that Zunia was not merely a companion to Jules in the field, but a competent ethnographer working as an equal partner; she acquired the Pilagá language with the same facility as Jules, demonstrated an astute understanding of everyday Pilagá sociology, integrated seamlessly into the families, and shared the full spectrum of ambivalent experiences inherent to ethnographic fieldwork. It is undoubtedly for this reason that, when reporting their research progress to Benedict and Boas, Jules was unstinting in his praise: "We have good studies of two neurotic children in our village, and Zunia has done some wonderful experimental work—modifications of David Levy's experiments. The experimental work makes one of those rare, clear as crystal demonstrations of a thesis."[17]

17. J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá (Argentina), 7/04/1937, RFBP, 29.5.

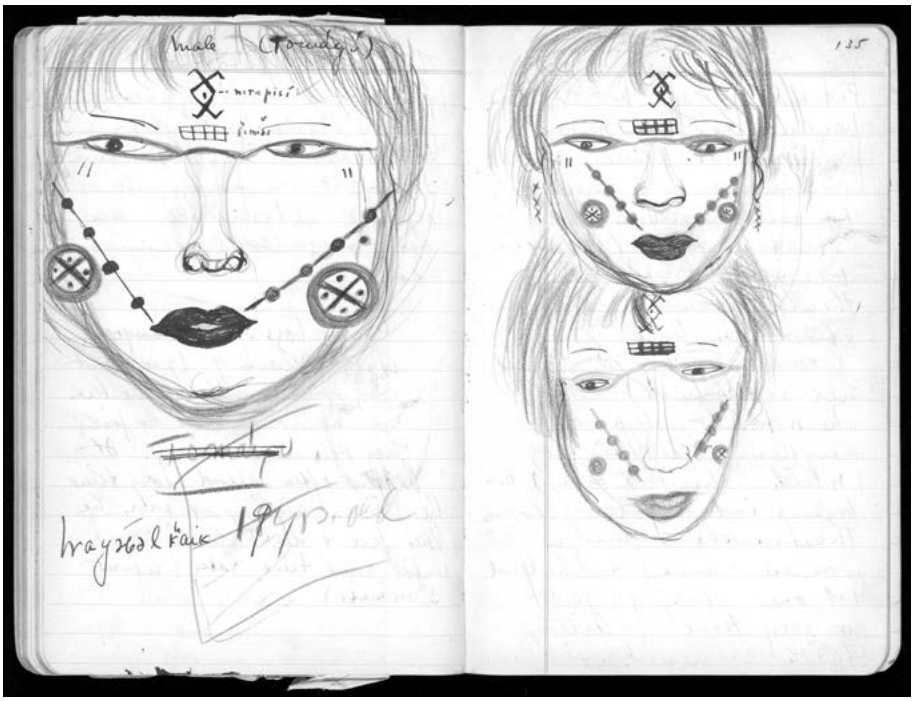


Fig. 4 – Tattoos in Zunia's notebook, Misión Pilagá, n. d.
(photo anonymous; Washington University Archives, Jules Henry Papers,
Serie 9, box 11, folder 23, photo nº 00098-s09-b12-f31-073)

Sibling rivalry among Pilagá children: field observations and doll play testing[18]

Observing and documenting the behavior of the Pilagá children in their natural environment did not pose a problem, for the mission children were ubiquitous: "as soon as one enters a Pilagá village one becomes aware of the children, for they are extremely violent and quarrelsome, and they are hungry for attention" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 8). Well before the Henrys initiated their doll play experiments during the final six months of their stay, they were struck by the hostility displayed by children between and within families regardless of birth order. The more time they spent observing Pilagá children in the field, the more they came to recognize a possible cultural blind spot in the American conception of sibling rivalry as described by Levy:

> The problem of sibling rivalry in our culture has generally been phrased in terms of the hostility of the older sibling to the one who has displaced him in the

18. This section draws heavily on Steele's in-progress biography of Jules Henry.

> mother's attentions. Thus, discussions of sibling rivalry have revolved about the loss, or fear of loss, of the mother by the older sibling … It is difficult to believe that the younger sibling is passive before the onslaught of the older brother or sister. It is also difficult to believe that in a culture which gives rise to competitive attitudes between siblings the competition developing around the mother should not be present very early in the younger as well as in the older sibling. It seems probable that where competition develops around the mother in such a culture that the attitudes of the siblings should be *symmetrical*. (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 23-24, italics in original)

The Henrys provided several behavioral examples of younger siblings displaying resentment toward an elder brother or sister (i.e., "symmetry"). They also provided instances of situations in which the younger sibling reciprocated the hostile actions of an older brother or sister with retaliatory hostile acts of their own ("reciprocal hostility"): "If all the children in a Pilagá family compete for the mother, the resulting hostility must become ever more intense … there is constant, reversible, and clearly perceptible flow of blows from one sibling to another … In all truth it may be said of a Pilagá baby that he learns to fight almost before he learns to walk" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 25-26).

They also discovered significant discrepancies in the ways that Pilagá children express their rivalrous feelings as compared to their middle-class North American counterparts, and attributed this to "differences in moral ideas and sentiments between the two cultures" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 20). In the American culture, Levy found an expectation that one should love, care for, and care about one's siblings. No such expectation exists among the Pilagá: "Sibling love is not a trait for which a Pilagá child obtains the approval of his parents. The rewards for sibling love are *nil*; the punishment for sibling injury mild … Hence it is not uncommon for a Pilagá child to detest his younger sibling and he does not attempt to conceal it and vice versa" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 21, italics in original).

The only exception to this generalization applies to infants. Among the Pilagá, there is a strong prohibition against violence directed at babies. Nor did the Henrys find any evidence that Pilagá children feel guilty about their hostile feelings toward a sibling. However, they did find one component of Levy's sibling rivalry "guilt complex" that Pilagá children shared with their American counterparts: "restitution", that is, actions that have the effect of making amends for hostile behavior: "Kapíetn [boy, age 3-4] for no visible reason makes a dive for his sister Kayolí [age 8] and she hits him. He screeches. She smiles. When he goes toward home, *she follows him and tries to pick him up*. He throws himself down in a tantrum. She picks him up and carries him into their house. *She gives him fruit and he stopped crying*" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 22, italics added).

As mentioned above, prior to going into the field, Zunia was trained by Levy in doll play methods. But once in the Chaco, she found it necessary to adjust these procedures based on local circumstances and the norms of the Pilagá people. For example, it was simply not feasible to isolate one child at a time for each trial, as Pilagá children customarily spent their days roaming the village in groups. Consequently, in any given trial, two or more children from the same or different families might be present and participate in the play session. Zunia dealt with this by focusing on the child specifically selected for a given trial, while noting any interactions between the "subject child" and non-subject children present at the time. She served as primary examiner for all trials and Jules frequently assisted by documenting the words and actions of the examinee. But more importantly she expanded the number of dolls in each trial to correspond to the number of persons in the examinee's household; and she identified each doll with the names of household members. In her interview with Wax and Cassell, Zunia describes the differences in Levy's and her experimental procedures. Levy's goal, she noted, was "to do therapy," so he limited the number of dolls to a mother doll, a sibling doll, and a baby doll and "he would set up the experiment in a way designed to bring up hostility, which is what he needed for therapy." Zunia had different goals and she explained:

> I wasn't doing therapy. I was really trying to find out what was going on in the lives of the children; how they thought, how they reacted, and so on. We had the daily observations, so I set up a totally different experiment. What I did was set up families … each child's own family. What I did was name the dolls for each family … I was able to name the family as they actually were … I just set up the whole family, including the father. (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988)

Consequently, Zunia adopted a "free play" approach in her doll play experiments, giving her subjects more latitude to express themselves. The advantage of her approach was that the nature of projected relationships between the child examinee and others in the family were more transparent. Once the trial was initiated, Zunia tried to avoid interacting with the child examinee any more than was necessary to keep the session going. She wanted each play session to unfold organically without influencing its direction (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 31, 43).

Between June 1937 and early November 1937, Zunia conducted 89 doll play experiments involving 24 children—13 girls and 11 boys—ranging in age from approximately 15 months to 12 years (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 31). In *Doll Play*..., the Henrys devote 49 of its 133 pages to verbatim "protocols" documenting the behavior of the participating children (**Figure 5**, next page). The example below reproduces the first of the nine trials recorded on an 8- or 9-year-old girl, Tapáñí. Tapáñí had two younger brothers: Yorodaikolík (age 4) and Denikí (age 15 months). In addition to Tapáñí, two other non-family

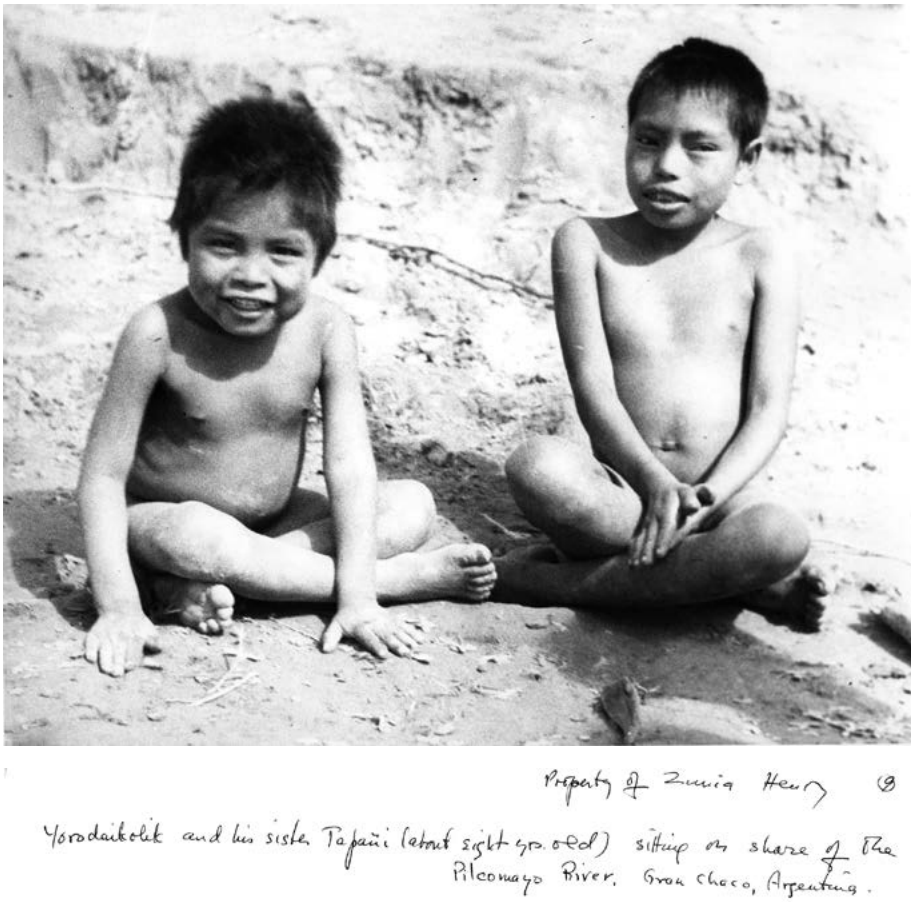


Fig. 5 – Pilagá siblings, Misión Pilagá, n. d.
(photo anonymous; Washington University Archives,
Jules Henry Papers, Series 7, photographs-gen_09)

children were present during this session: Simíti (female age 10) and Dañakána (female age 6). The example illustrates the level of detail the Henrys recorded for each of the 89 sessions they conducted with their 24 subjects, for an average of 3.7 trials per examinee. It also demonstrates how they managed sessions in which children other than the subject of record were present and participating in some way:

> Trial 1. 6-24-37. At first Tapáñi pays no attention to the dolls, only playing with the [toy] turtle. Then she picks up the self-doll and places it on the mother doll's arms. Simíti [female, age 10, another child present during the trial] puts the two other dolls on the mother doll's shoulder. Tapáñi growls at her. Tapáñi plays

> with the turtle. It goes toward the self-doll but does not strike it. Examiner [ZH] says: "Perhaps it likes you so it won't bite you. But perhaps it will bite anyone it doesn't like." Tapáñi says "Yes." She then makes the turtle bite the mother doll (1) and both sibling dolls (2) (3) [Each hostile act is parenthetically numbered in sequence] and [she] says "It doesn't like them so it bites them. It doesn't bite Simíti and Dañakána because it likes them." She has the turtle bite the mother doll and both sibling dolls over and over again (4) (5) (6). Then she puts turtle near self-doll. Examiner: "Has it bitten you?" Tapáñi: "No. Look, it likes me." (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 88)

Zunia's comment during the trial—"Perhaps it likes you so it won't bite you" and "perhaps it will bite anyone it doesn't like"—may have influenced Tapáñi's subsequent actions during this trial, contrary to Zunia's intention to avoid (or at least minimize) her participation. This may be a problem, but perhaps an unavoidable one given the setting in which these trials were carried out. To their credit, the Henrys dutifully recorded the examiner's participation, giving the reader an opportunity to assess whether this intervention influenced the flow of examinee behavior.

Based upon their ethnographic observation of the children's interactions and behavior in their everyday natural settings, coupled with the results of Zunia's structured doll play experiments, the Henrys discovered that as a phenomenon sibling rivalry was both more complex and more interesting than the "simple" age-based pattern among the children described by Levy in his 1937 monograph. Field observation revealed that hostility toward siblings, *going in both directions*, was a fact of everyday life for Pilagá children (**Figure 6**, next page). The doll play data were highly consistent with these observations, leading the Henrys to report "the greater the overt hostility between siblings, the greater the number of attacks [portrayed by the children] in the experiments" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 34). Their data, in field and "laboratory," led the Henrys to conclude that sibling rivalry did exist among the Pilagá in forms similar to those observed in the United States. But there were also differences between the two cultures in how the rivalry manifested itself. Most notably, unlike their American counterparts, Pilagá children did not express "guilt" for their hostile feelings or engage in "self-punishment" for acting on them. Thus, the Henrys suggested that sibling rivalry may very well be a human universal, but one subject to variation based on cultural factors.

Fieldwork challenges and frustrations

In the Chaco the Henrys had to contend with a harsh and unforgiving climate, food shortages, poor living conditions, uncertain funding, health issues, the challenge of mastering a difficult language, and the inevitable irritations associated with prolonged living among people whose beliefs and behaviors are very

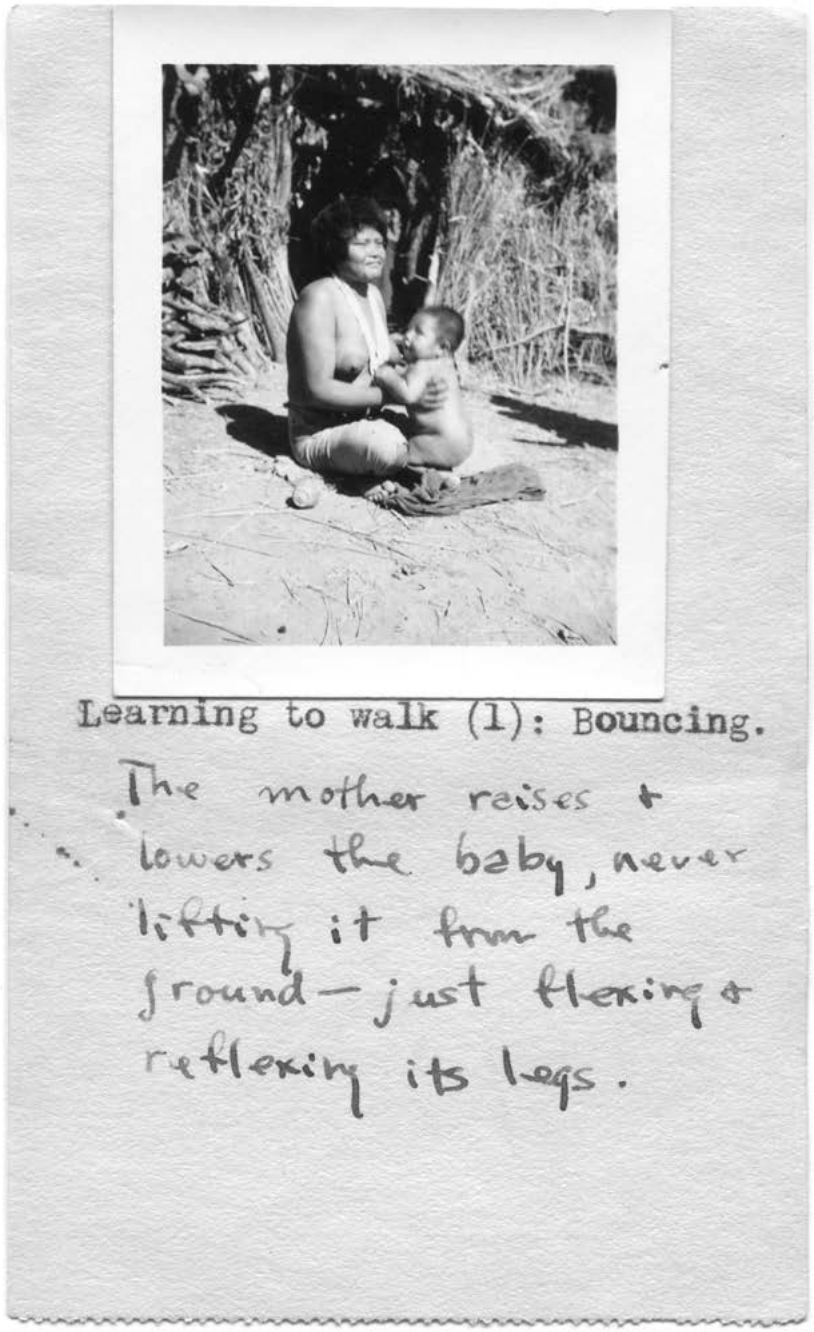


Fig. 6 – Pilagá mother and baby, Misión Pilagá, n. d.
(photo anonymous; Washington University Archives,
Jules Henry Papers, Series 7, photo nº 03-023)

different from one's own. But they rose to the occasion, gained robust rapport with the Pilagá people, achieved fluency in their language, and accomplished the research goals that brought them to Misión Pilagá in the first place. Through their correspondence with Boas and Benedict, it is possible to reconstruct the progression of their research as well as the various setbacks and challenges they encountered. This correspondence also reveals the complicated and ambivalent feelings they had about the Pilagá.

The near-idyllic conditions Métraux first described when he was trying to convince them to work among the Pilagá did not prepare them for the unbearable summer heat and "devil winds" that Jules commented upon in several of his letters, and that Zunia still remembered with a shudder over fifty years later (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988). The autumn and winter dry season brought widespread famine to the region and daily subsistence became a source of particular friction. The *algarroba* fruit—a local primary dietary staple—became increasingly scarce, the yield of forest products diminished, and food reserves stockpiled during the summer months were quickly depleted. A letter Jules sent to Benedict in early July 1937 paints a grim picture of their situation: "I believe we will have to come home in October even if our work is unfinished because the Chaco summer is absolutely unbearable for us. The heat and the constant hell's breath north wind prostrates and unnerves us. We cannot think, cannot sleep, and there is never enough to eat."[19] In an undated diary entry, likely originating from this period, Zunia wrote:

> When we eat we become conscious of every individual. The tension becomes terrific. One is afraid to smile at anyone. People begin to whisper and everyone is conscious of your food. Women pass by our house for any reason at all. Last night Yalakachi'n stood as she does every night before our tent against the little tree … [undecipherable name] came along and said she had just come to ask for some firewood. We gave her a piece of duck and she was quieted and went home. Ninarachi too came and looked in as we're eating lunch. One doesn't dare smile at anyone strange for fear they'll sit on your door step for hours and beg. If anything is given to a member of another village, a steady stream of people come … If anything is to be given to anyone here, I have to protect it so it won't be torn out of my hand by the children. (Zunia Henry diary extract, undated, WUA, Series 9, Box 11)

At one point, nearly the entire village was emptied when the managers of a sugarcane plantation recruited almost every able-bodied person for the harvest, effectively shutting down data collection. In the July 4, 1937 letter quoted earlier in this section, an exasperated Jules complains:

> The other dreadful thing that has happened is that the Mayordomo from the great sugar plantation in Salta came up here and asked the Indians to go to work in the

19. J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá (Argentina), 7/04/1937, RFBP, 29.5.

> cane fields. Over two hundred Indians have left this mission to go to the cane fields for 5 months … The missionary school population has fallen from 100 to 25. All this means that we will not be able to study the large "cooperative" enterprises or the life of the adolescents. The whole life will move at a low tempo and people will be thrown together who ordinarily would not have much to do with each other … We are wondering what these people are going to eat. The combination of reduced population and fear of Paraguayan bullets is going to mean semi-starvation of these people. (J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá [Argentina], 7/04/1937, RFBP, 29.5)

Ultimately, the Henrys decided to follow the people into the cane fields. As it turned out, they were able to continue their work there and they even discovered that some people were more forthcoming once they were beyond the missionaries' influence.

Henry's comment about the "fear of Paraguayan bullets" in his July 4, 1937 letter warrants further comment. The Pilcomayo region had been plagued by pervasive daily violence since the conclusion of the Chaco War in July 1935 (Rousseau 2024). Oral histories abound with accounts of Indians being shot by the military along the riverbanks. Conflicts between Indigenous peoples, military units—Paraguayan, Bolivian, and Argentinian—and *Criollo* settlers were commonplace along the frontier, and even the Anglican missionaries were not exempt (Córdoba 2020). A climate of fear deterred many from risking crossing into Paraguayan territory to forage, fish, or hunt in what was, ultimately, their ancestral land. Those who did cross the river to scavenge weapons and discarded war materiel from the Bolivian and Paraguayan battlefields fueled the alarm of the Argentine military guarding the border. In his correspondence, Jules documented the abuses suffered by the Pilagá, as well as their occasional counter-offensives, suggesting he and Zunia may have had concerns for their own safety.[20]

However, Jules' correspondence and diary entries attributed to Zunia also give voice to the ebb and flow of ambivalent feelings about the Pilagá people. On March 25, 1937, following brief visits to Wichí and Toba villages, Jules shared positive feelings with Ruth Benedict:

> We are quite pleased with the Pilagá as people. Not only are they beautiful—the best formed types in this part of the Chaco—but there is something in their character that has made them the last of the intransigents. Of these intransigents we are studying the most intransigent. They are half iron and gunpowder and half something else that is very likable and even endearing. They have had some terrible [unreadable] in recent years and hundreds have been killed, but as far as we see they are on the whole among the best people in Argentina. (J. Henry to R. Benedict, Ingeniero Juárez [Argentina], 3/25/1937, RFBP, 29.5)

20. See e.g., J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá (Argentina), 4/17/1937, RFBP, 29.5.

By October 23, 1937, Jules was telling a different story:

> The Pilagá, we have decided, are a ghastly lot, but it is amazing how they live in peace and quiet in the midst of their own viciousness. They are absolutely busting with poison. The poor tormented children. God pity them. From earliest morning their faces are streaked with tears, and they go to bed with the marks of their suffering on their tormented little faces. No wonder the Pilagá were one of the, or the, fiercest tribes in the Chaco—or all South America. The poison that is brewed in the soul of a little four-year-old is enough to annihilate the world (J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá [Argentina], 10/23/[1937], RFBP, 29.5).

Clearly, the pressures of fieldwork were taking a toll on both of the Henrys. To make matters worse, at the time they were also putting up with irritating demands from Métraux, who remained convinced that Jules was his protégé and made a habit of directing incessant inquiries to both of the Henrys as well as Arnott, who was himself finding it impossible to satisfy the demands of two anthropologists at once. Métraux was preparing a series of publications of his own on the Indigenous populations of the Chaco and planning a major "Chaco expedition" (Córdoba 2015); as the publication deadline approached, his anxious requests to the Henrys and Arnott grew increasingly insistent. Henry eventually vented his frustration to Benedict:

> I have been receiving letters from Métraux asking for all kinds of detailed ethnological information and asking me also to make various collections of material culture for the University of California. Today I received a list of 35 questions ranging in subject matter from phonetics to cosmology and with a promise of more to come. Even were I in a position to do all he wants it would take more time than I could possibly spare. (J. Henry to R. Benedict, Ingeniero Juárez [Argentina], 3/25/1937, RFBP, 29.5)

Métraux's inquiries were as burdensome for Arnott as they were for the Henrys. Arnott also worried that many of the subjects that he was requesting information about would fall under the scope of the Henrys' forthcoming study (Córdoba 2017a). In response to one such request, Arnott responded:

> Nor would it be altogether fair for me to send you such a terminology for publication when Dr. Henry hopes to publish his findings when he gets back to the States. I think you will realize now that, except for questions on minor details, I cannot send you for publication information on subjects which Dr. Henry is studying—subjects which he hopes to publish. It seems so much like my pitting my amateurish gropings against Dr. Henry's expert studies. And that, not to mention the feeling I have that the whole thing smirks [*sic*] of what amounts to plagiarism. (J. Arnott to A. Métraux, Misión Pilagá [Argentina], 4/30/1937, LAS, fonds Alfred Métraux)

For many reasons, then, it was time for the Henrys to take leave of the Chaco. Jules and Zunia set sail on November 27, 1937, arriving in New York on December 15. Neither of them would ever step foot in the Chaco again.

Back home in New York

On the Henrys' return to the United States, Benedict arranged for Jules to be appointed "Assistant in Anthropology" at Columbia. This position provided Jules and Zunia a modicum of support to begin writing up their Pilagá data. They returned to a department in transition, as Boas retired his chairmanship of anthropology at Columbia University in 1937 and was replaced by Ralph Linton.[21]

In New York, Jules resumed correspondence with Arnott, peppering him with questions to ask the Pilagá as he and Zunia analyzed field data and sought to fill in the inevitable gaps that became apparent in the process. The correspondence between the Henrys and Arnott was always friendly in tone and unwaveringly cordial. Between late 1937 and the end of 1939, Arnott sent a substantial number of letters written in Pilagá by the mission's inhabitants. Furthermore, he managed the funds remitted by Henry to compensate the Pilagá—a task that, predictably, generated friction with certain *caciques* (chiefs) who believed they were being underpaid or suspected that "Julio" Henry had sent more money than was actually being disbursed. On these occasions, Arnott typed the letters and even added handwritten clarifications in English, while at other times, he provided the Pilagá with paper, pencils, or a typewriter so they could personally respond to Jules' inquiries. The most compelling aspect of this correspondence lies in the fact that the letters Arnott transcribed for the American anthropologists were generally written in Pilagá. Jules and Zunia responded with ease, demonstrating their linguistic proficiency. As Jules wrote: "We were overjoyed to receive your letters. The letters you sent from the Indians are also splendid. They throw light on many things I wanted to know about tribal names and clear up the general picture in my mind" (J. Henry to J. Arnott, New York City, 7/19/1938, WUA, Series 9, Box 10, Folder 5, letters-Pilagá 019). The final correspondence dates to 1939, when Arnott informed the Henrys of his enlistment in the Allied forces to serve in World War II (Córdoba 2020, p. 125-130).

Meanwhile, relations with Métraux remained ambivalent. On the one hand, the Henrys felt burdened by his persistent demands for ethnographic data. On the other, having spent fourteen uninterrupted months among the Pilagá and attaining a commendable command of their language, they seemed to believe that—despite his international reputation—Métraux had not spent sufficient

21. Boas had been in ill health for several years and he had handed over many of his administrative responsibilities to Ruth Benedict prior to his retirement. Boas saw Benedict as a logical and deserving heir to the chairmanship of the Columbia department, but the university was not ready yet to appoint a woman and Ralph Linton was awarded that prize in the fall of 1937. Boas and some faculty and students made it known they were not happy with the choice. Linton, of course, had his own allies, setting the stage for political intrigue and in-fighting, as he and Benedict did not get along; neither liked nor trusted the other (see, e.g., Caffey 1989; Meyerowitz 2010; Modell 1983; Young 2005).

time in the field; furthermore, they held a low opinion of his proficiency in the local languages. Their lack of confidence in the empirical rigor of Métraux's Chacoan ethnography surfaced in private contexts, such as when Benedict commissioned Jules, while he was still in the field, to review a manuscript by Métraux on Wichí ("Matako") mythology:

> Yesterday I sent you Métraux's MS of Matako myths. I kept it because I was very much undecided about it and because Métraux says he is coming back to the Matako. You will find that I went over the entire thing and did some editing. This I did on the boat coming south. It is very difficult for me to give you a definite answer to your question "Should they be published in the JAFL [*Journal of American Folklore*]." If you read the introduction, you will see the condition under which the myths were collected. Palavecino of the National Museum here is publishing a very much similar collection of myths. Perhaps they are already in print. Métraux himself insists that he is coming back to the Chaco and is going to make a complete study of the Matako. Métraux does not know the Matako language. As for [the] general character of the collection, I am not in a position to say whether it is good or bad.[22] (J. Henry to R. Benedict, Misión Pilagá [Argentina], 10/01/1937, RFBP, 29.5)

Times were difficult for the Henrys in the year following their return to the US. The country was still mired in depression and academic positions were difficult to come by. Living hand-to-mouth on a meager $1,000 per year salary, Jules divided his time between analyzing and writing up the voluminous data he and Zunia had collected on Pilagá children (see, e.g., Henry 1939, 1940), teaching when and where he could, and the seemingly never-ending search for a permanent job. Zunia was also busy sifting through her field notes, analyzing doll play data, doing what she could to support Jules emotionally, and working to get her musical career back on track. In her 1988 interview, she remembers that Boas, Benedict, and Mead all tried to convince her to stay in anthropology: " 'You're already a famous anthropologist, stay with us. You can have anything you want.' I said, 'No, I'm a musician'." So Zunia went back to her music, but she admitted: "In spite of myself I found anthropology fascinating. I never really got it out of my system!" (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988).

A letter Jules wrote Benedict in early October 1939 conveys his low morale at that moment:

> [T]hings do not look rosy around here for us. The job I tried to get in Connecticut [University of Connecticut] has fallen through and my write-up money expires with my last check on Nov 9. I'm applying for a Guggenheim for work in Mexico, but that seems a rather forlorn hope … Could you get me an extension of my write-up money? I am sure that the [Pilagá] monograph will not be done before June … principally because of the extraordinary difficulty of the language …

22. Ultimately, the manuscript was not published by Benedict.

> I feel very guilty about bothering you … but I really don't know what to do. (J. Henry to R. Benedict, New York City, 10/06/1939, RFBP, 29.5)

We were unable to locate Benedict's reply, but Jules' response thanked her for a "very reassuring" letter that left him and Zunia "feeling much better," noting his pessimism in contrast to Zunia's "unshakable optimism."[23] Benedict had indeed secured $1,000 to support the Henrys, and she proposed they do fieldwork in Mexico. Reluctant to begin new research before completing their Pilagá analysis, they led her to agree that the funds be used instead to extend Columbia's "write-up" support.

Mexico detour, World War II, and the post-war years

Whether the Pilagá monograph was finished or not, the Henrys were destined for Mexico after all, sooner rather than later. On January 19, 1940, Jules wrote Benedict a brief letter with an all-caps bold banner and seven exclamation marks reading: "I'VE GOT A JOB IN MEXICO!!!!!!!" He was ecstatic: "I'm really quite delighted and so is Zunia. The work will be to the point and under a progressive government. One will not have the feeling of dying of dry rot that is so characteristic of people around here these days."[24] Zunia added her own typed note to the letter Jules had written in which she summed up her feelings about the toll the past year had taken on her husband:

> This period has been such a degrading one for Jules at Columbia that I am glad he is getting away. I don't like what it has done to both him and me. You have been very sweet and a great comfort to us. Please take care of yourself and keep well —if only as a public service. You know there really must be at least one intelligent and sane person in the department and you'll need lots of strength. (J. Henry [with note added from Zunia] to R. Benedict, New York City, 1/19/1940, RFBP, 29.5)

The position offered to Jules was that of linguist in Mexico's Department of Indian Affairs, codifying unwritten Indigenous languages for use in native classrooms. Not long after getting this job offer, he landed a second offer for a concurrent position to teach anthropology at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute). While employed in Mexico, Jules was known as "Julio Enríquez" (David Robichaux, personal communication, March 19, 2026).

Events moved quickly. In less than a month, the Henrys were posting letters to Boas and Benedict from Mexico City. Zunia spent her time in Mexico working with the Pilagá data and supporting Jules on the home front, including playing hostess to several Indigenous students who spent their days in the Henry residence working with Jules and Department of Indian Affairs colleagues in

23. J. Henry to R. Benedict, New York City, 10/15/1939, RFBP, 29.5.
24. J. Henry to R. Benedict, New York City, 01/19/1940, RFBP, 29.5.

developing alphabets for native languages. In November 1940, a pregnant Zunia returned to the United States to await the birth of their first (and only) child, leaving Jules without the support and companionship of a devoted wife during a turbulent period in his life. Embroiled in interpersonal conflicts in the anthropology department, and fearful of losing his position in the Department of Indian Affairs due to budget cuts and changing priorities under a new national government, Jules was miserable—misery made worse by missing his wife and a baby he had yet to see. While living in New York during this period Zunia was able to work closely with Rorschach expert Anna Hartoch Schachtel on the analysis of the Pilagá Rorschach responses she and Jules collected in the field (see Schachtel, Henry, and Henry 1942). After being apart six months, the Henrys were reunited in Mexico on August 4, 1941, and Jules was able to lay eyes on his daughter for the first time.

Despite his unhappiness and the tenuous nature of his position, the Mexico detour proved to be consequential in Jules' professional development. The late Harold Gould (1926-2021), Jules' graduate student and friend of many years, observed that Jules' experience in Mexico at the tail-end of the socialist reforms initiated by the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940) "strengthened and helped him articulate a concern for socialist solutions to man's problems which the dreadful consequences of world depression had awakened in many intellectuals" (Gould 1971, p. 790), including Zunia, who brought these sentiments with her to her marriage. Gould also noted that the Henrys had "already been sensitized to the need for morally significant action by the plight of the Pilaga, who were being badly oppressed by local Argentine landlords" (ibid., p. 791).

During the Henrys' stay in Mexico, there had been intermittent talk about Jules being offered a position in Brazil at the National Museum to conduct research on Indigenous peoples and train aspiring Brazilian anthropologists there. Jules was skeptical about the long-term viability of this position and Zunia was not enthusiastic about relocating to Rio de Janeiro. Ultimately, despite his ambivalence, and Zunia's reservations, Jules felt he had no choice but to accept the position, and the Henrys left Mexico for the United States to prepare for the move to Rio de Janeiro, arriving in New York the week of November 24, 1941. Two weeks later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, plunging the United States into a long-anticipated war with Japan and Germany. Jules was anxious to contribute to the war effort. This gave him an off-ramp as he rescinded his acceptance of the National Museum of Brazil position. By February 1942, he was serving as a social science analyst for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Program Survey Division. This would be the first of several agency positions he would hold between 1942 and 1947 in support of the US war effort. We know little about Zunia's activities during the war

years, beyond the fact that she was raising their young daughter while Jules was frequently away on government business.

Government service in World War II had a profound impact on Jules' vision of what anthropology could and should be, as well as on his approach to "doing anthropology." His first assignment in 1942 in the USDA Program Survey Division was to develop and refine methods for assessing and evaluating the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the American public related to governmental programs and policies. One of his last assignments in 1945 was to serve on a team tasked to assess the impact of the US strategic bombing campaign on the morale of the Japanese people. In his review of the trajectory of his mentor and friend's career, Gould argues: "The war and its aftermath drew Jules Henry irrevocably into the study of the complex national systems in which mankind increasingly lives. He was drawn especially toward the study of man in the context of American society" (Gould 1971, p. 791).

In 1947, Jules Henry left government service and moved his family to St. Louis, Missouri, where he accepted a position as Associate Professor of Anthropology at Washington University. He would spend the rest of his career and life on the "Wash U" faculty. From time to time, he would publish a sporadic article about the Chaco and the Pilagá (Henry 1951), but mainly he shifted his research focus from small-scale, indigenous, New World peoples to the anthropology of a large-scale and complex society—the United States of America. For the next two decades, his fieldwork sites were public-school classrooms, psychiatric clinics and hospitals, nursing homes for the elderly, and the homes of "ordinary" families in the American Midwest. Zunia's role shifted too: from data-gathering partner and co-author to sounding board, informant, critic, commentator, and editor. Throughout her adult life, Zunia continued to be infatuated by anthropology but music remained her passion (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988).

Beginning in the late 1950s, Henry embedded himself for periods of a week or more in the homes of suburban families that included a child institutionalized for severe mental illness, observing their daily lives, routines, power structures, and communicative patterns. After each period living with these families, Jules extensively debriefed with Zunia about what he had seen, heard, and learned, and how these family patterns may have contributed to the institutionalized child's mental illness. Zunia notes that she did not always agree with Jules' analysis and that she was willing to challenge him and suggest alternative interpretations (Henry, Wax, and Cassell 1988). While on sabbatical leave in 1966-1967 as a fellow at the prestigious Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California, Jules drafted a book on the emergence of mental disorders in five families based on his observations of their everyday lives. *Pathways to Madness* was published posthumously by Random



Fig. 7 – Jules and Zunia, n. d. (photo anonymous; Washington University Archives, Jules Henry Papers, Series 7, photo nº E18-01)

House in 1971.[25] Diverging from clinical studies that analyze the individual in isolation, Henry argued that many behaviors deemed pathological develop and are sustained through dysfunctional or conflictual cultural and familial dynamics. Zunia's role in this research was pivotal as a sounding board and critic. Jules explicitly acknowledged her contribution when he wrote: "I have discussed every page of this book with my wife, and it is likely that some of its weakness might have been eliminated had I accepted more of her suggestions" (Henry 1971, p. xi). Fittingly, Jules dedicated *Pathways to Madness* "to my wife Zunia, who has been the liberating force in my life" (Henry 1971, unnumbered dedication page) (**Figure 7**).

Ensuring Jules Henry's legacy

In 1967, at age 63, Jules Henry suffered a career-ending stroke rendering him unable to speak and with limited mobility. In 1969, he suffered a massive heart attack that took his life. Zunia was determined to do whatever she could do to preserve Jules' legacy in anthropology. She donated the contents of their archives

25. Jules Henry's best-known book, *Culture Against Man*, which he characterized as a "passionate ethnography" and critique of American society, was also published by Random House in 1963. It sold well and was widely reviewed in professional journals and the popular press, making Jules a minor university celebrity.

to Washington University (St. Louis, United States), and thus ensured that his work and their work together was preserved (Miranda Rectenwald, personal communication, April 14, 2026). While still grieving her loss, she took on the labor-intensive task of overseeing the preparation of his completed *Pathways to Madness* manuscript for publication, communicating frequently with Random House editor Bernice Hoffman. In one handwritten note to Hoffman, dated November 23, 1969, Zunia acknowledged the weight of the responsibility:

> I hope I will receive all that's left to do. Introduction, conclusions, anything, and everything else. It's been a long haul—but I've been working against almost every possible obstacle. I hope I've been of some help and hope too that I have done no damage to this unbelievable work of Jules'. I feel better knowing you will be working on it now. (Z. Henry to B. Hoffman, Saint Louis [Missouri], WUA, 11/23/1969, Series 2, Box 2)

Driven by a deep concern for participant privacy, Zunia meticulously suggested alterations to family names, occupations, and even cultural references to obscure the subjects' identities. In a letter to Hoffman, she went so far as to recommend changing movie title references and popular song names from the 1950s when Jules did his research to ones that were more recent, all to alter clues as to the families' identities. However, she balanced this protective instinct with a commitment to scientific integrity, at one point reversing her own edits to ensure that "clinically important" facts, such as a family member's medical diagnosis, were reported accurately.[26] Her efforts extended to shielding the project's funding sources and social service and child health agencies from whom the *Pathways…* families were recruited.

Once *Pathways…* reached the galley stage of the publishing process, Zunia reviewed every line of every page of the publisher's galley proofs against Jules's final completed draft. This was no small task: at 477 pages, *Pathways…* was a big book. Zunia caught hundreds of errors in the process and the book was released to critical acclaim in 1971. Zunia had to have been pleased.

Zunia's editorial efforts extended beyond this single volume. Indeed, she also wrote to Hoffman: "Does Random House want to do a book (or more than one) of essays with an introduction by Margaret Mead?"[27] In short order, Random House put out two collections of essays—some not previously published—in *Jules Henry on Education* (1972) and *Jules Henry on Sham, Vulnerability, and Other Forms of Self-Destruction* (1973), but without introductions by Margaret Mead or anyone else. Although only listed in these collections as

26. See, also, Z. Henry to B. Hoffman, Saint Louis (Missouri), WUA, 11/23/1969, Series 2, Box 2.

27. Z. Henry to B. Hoffman, Saint Louis (Missouri), WUA, 11/23/1969, Series 2, Box 2.

copyright holder, Zunia was indeed responsible for selecting and ordering the essays included in each book.

The connection between Zunia, Jules' legacy, and the *Pathways to Madness* book continued well into the next decade. In the 1980s, she facilitated a translation of his *Pathways*... ethnographic work to the theater stage.[28] Timothy McDonough and Vincent Murphy, theater professors at Tufts University and later Emory University, recognized the dramatic potential of the book. Although Zunia had recently rejected a television producer's proposal to base a television production on *Pathways*..., she was eventually won over by McDonough's "dogged tenacity," which she poignantly noted reminded her of Jules himself.[29] Three of Jules' case studies did eventually find their way to the stage in the 1980s and 1990s—the Metz and the Wilson families from *Pathways to Madness* and the Ross family saga from a chapter in *Culture Against Man*. The Metz family case study was the first to be staged and it debuted in Boston in 1982. Zunia read the draft of the Metz family script and provided page-by-page, line-by-line feedback. Jules appears as a character in this play (as he did in the other two completed *Pathways*... plays) as a narrator and commentator, and at times interacting with other characters on stage. Zunia was particularly sensitive to how he was portrayed, commenting, for example: "page eight, last 15 lines" and "page 9, first 2 lines … delete all that Jules was given to say. It's unfair to him, totally unlike him, makes him sound like a fool and a liar. He was neither" (memo from Z. Henry to T. McDonough, DSPF). While the critics gave the play mixed reviews, Zunia granted it her full approval; she was particularly captivated by McDonough's performance as Jules, remarking that he had successfully captured his voice and cadence.[30]

Epilogue

Frail and in failing health, Zunia Henry died at 95 in 1998 in a nursing home after a long illness. Her life follows a trajectory that is both inspiring

28. The first play, sharing the title of the book *Pathways to Madness: The Metz Family*, premiered at TheaterWorks in Boston in November 1982 (see https://www.timmcdonough.net/directing-and-new-works). The scripts for *Pathways to Madness: The Metz Family* by Jules Henry, *Pathways to Madness: The Wilson Family*, and *Georgie Nobody* are currently held in the DSPF.

29. Timothy McDonough and Vincent Murphy, personal communication with David Steele, Atlanta, January 26, 2016.

30. Timothy McDonough and Vincent Murphy, personal communication with David Steele, Atlanta, January 26, 2016. McDonough and Murphy subsequently teamed up to produce and stage plays based on the Ross and Wilson families from *Culture Against Man* and *Pathways to Madness* respectively in Atlanta. Zunia gave them permission to use Jules' material, but she did not participate in the preparation or production of these two additional plays.

and deeply reflective of the systemic erasures within 20th-century academia. In fact, her legacy is usually entangled with her husband's. Originally a classically trained musician, Zunia's entry into anthropology was prompted by her marriage and the mentorship of towering figures like Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. What began as a personal partnership then evolved into a rigorous scientific collaboration during a fourteen-month expedition to the Pilagá people of the Gran Chaco from 1936 to 1937.

However, after her outstanding performance among the Pilagá, including publication, she consciously restricted her role to supporting Jules' career. It is striking that the 1974 re-issue of their collaborative and co-authored monograph includes a comprehensive recapitulation of Jules' academic achievements, institutional appointments, and publications, while Zunia's biography is reduced to a single, laconic sentence: "Zunia Henry lives in St. Louis" (Henry and Henry 1974 [1944], p. 135). But she was far more than a mere field companion. She was a competent ethnographer and co-investigator who authored nearly a third of the research field notebooks and achieved a solid command of the Pilagá language that allowed her to gain an intimate insight into the culture. Her work was particularly groundbreaking in the study of Indigenous childhood, and she served as the lead examiner for the psychological assessments, skillfully blending ethnographic observation with the application and interpretation of doll play and Rorschach projective testing. This interdisciplinary approach—specifically her work on sibling rivalry and child development—provided a foundation for the co-authored monograph, a text that remains a significant, if long-obscured, chapter in Chacoan ethnography.

The middle and later years of Zunia's life reveal a poignant shift in her professional identity. She consciously pivoted to a role that supported and promoted Jules' burgeoning career; and, after his death, she also became a steward of his academic legacy, serving as the bridge between his raw research and his most celebrated published work. Jules himself acknowledged her influence, calling her the "liberating force" of his life. Following his death, her role shifted once again. She shouldered the immense ethical and administrative burden of shepherding *Pathways to Madness* to publication, meticulously balancing participant privacy with scientific accuracy. As a de facto literary executor, she also curated Jules' posthumous essay collections and later facilitated the translation of his ethnographic work into the theater, ensuring his insights on the cultural roots of mental illness endured and reached a broader audience.

By rescuing Zunia Henry from historical obscurity, we wish to highlight the vital role of non-professional women in the development of 20th-century Americanist anthropology. Zunia's unique connection with Pilagá women and children allowed her to record detailed sociolinguistic and behavioral data that might otherwise have remained inaccessible to male researchers of the era.

Thus, her contributions provide a crucial foundation for understanding the intersection of psychology and ethnography, ensuring her place as a significant pioneer in the anthropological study of Indigenous South America. *

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DSPF David Steele Personal File, New Mexico, United States.

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RFBP Archives and Special Collections, Vassar College, Ruth Fulton Benedict Papers, 29.4, 29.5, 29.7, New York, United States.

WUA Washington University in St. Louis, University Archives and Special Collections, Jules Henry Papers, 1933-1959, Series 2, Series 7 and Series 9, St. Louis, United States.

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