

Mary Douglas (1921-2007) Papers, 1948-1985

Series 11/3/2/2

Boxes 1-7 (Including one half-size box)

Biography

Social anthropologist Dame Mary Tew Douglas was born March 25, 1921, in San Remo, Italy, daughter of Gilbert Charles Tew and Phyllis Twomey. She was educated at the Sacred Heart Convent in Roehampton, England. Douglas attended Oxford University where she earned the degrees of B.A. (1943), M.A. (1947), B.Sci. (1948), and Ph.D. (1951). That same year she married James A.T. Douglas, an economist for the Conservative Party Research Department. The couple had three children: Janet, James, and Philip.

From 1943 to 1947 Mary Douglas was employed at the British Colonial Office. She did field work in 1949-51 in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) preparing an ethnographic survey of Nyasaland, to which she returned for further research in 1953. From 1951 to 1970 she lectured in anthropology at University College, London, and from 1971 to 1978 was Professor of Social Anthropology there. She also held visiting lectureships at the Sorbonne (1967), the University of Illinois (1969), the University of Chicago (1969), New York University (1978-79), Columbia (1979-80), and Yale (1980-81). She came to New York in 1977 as director of research on culture for the Russell Sage Foundation. In 1981 she was named Avalon Professor in the Humanities at Northwestern University, with joint appointments in the departments of anthropology and history and literature of religions. She retired from this position in 1985.

Douglas was internationally known for her scholarship and was considered the one of the foremost social anthropologists of her generation. Her early work dealt with the Lele of the Kasai in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and with concepts of pollution, hygiene, and taboo in Africa, Europe, and the Near East. She was an innovator in the application of anthropological methods to the study of modern societies with her work on social factors in classification systems, and on the anthropology of food, of consumption, and of risk assessment.

Two of her most influential books were *Purity and Danger* (1966), a study of taboo, and *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970). Her other works include *The World of Goods* (with Baron Isherwood, 1979), a work of economic anthropology; *Edward Evans-Pritchard* (1980), a study of the distinguished anthropologist with whom she studied; *Risk and Culture* (with Aaron Wildavsky, 1982), a controversial analysis of environmentalism; *In the Active Voice* (1982), a collection of essays; *How Institutions Think* (1986); *In the Wilderness* (1993), a study on the construction and context of the Book of Numbers; *Missing Persons* (1998); *Leviticus as Literature* (1999), a revision of her own earlier work on Jewish dietary codes in *Purity and Danger*; and *Jacob's Tears* (2004), which addressed the editorship of the Pentateuch. She edited several books and was the author of numerous articles and reviews which appeared in such publications as the *Times Literary Supplement*, *New Society*, and the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Her many honors and awards included a term as vice president of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1974-77), election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1974), election as a fellow of the British Academy (1989), Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1992), and Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (2007).

Mary Douglas died on May 16, 2007.

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Description of the Series

This series of six and one-half boxes contains materials relating to Mary Douglas' scholarly research and publication. There is little concerning her teaching career and practically nothing of a personal nature. In addition to a small amount of biographical materials, the papers are arranged into two subseries: African research materials and publications.

The African research materials consist chiefly of research notes, diaries and correspondence compiled in the field during 1949-50 and 1953, with a small amount of later correspondence and drafts. The materials are broken into the following categories: correspondence, research notes, journals, and theses.

A folder of general correspondence, arranged chronologically (1949-68), contains material relating to both research topics and the political situation in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Two folders contain correspondence (1972-77) with and about the young anthropologist Ngokwey Ndolamb, a member of the Lele tribe, concerning his own work, his investigations updating Douglas' research among the Lele, and her efforts to further his scholarly career.

Eleven folders of field research notes are arranged alphabetically by topical headings. They contain handwritten notes, maps, diagrams, charts, and drafts (c. 1949-53) on various aspects of the geography, economy, language, and culture of Nyasaland and particularly, the Lele of the Kasai. The notes are undated and there appears to be considerable overlap between topics.

Seven journals (c. 1949-53) contain notes on similar topics. Three of these are undated journals of reading notes, in French, on Africa and the Congo. Two are small, undated notebooks on language. The remainder date from 195.E and contain diary entries and notes on hunting, sorcery, pollution, and kinship.

Rounding out the African research materials are typewritten copies of Mary Douglas's unpublished B.S. thesis (1948) entitled "Bride Wealth in Africa" and her unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "A Study of the Social Organization of the Kasai" (1952).

Materials relating to publications, including notes, drafts, clippings, reviews, and correspondence (1953-1985) with agents, publishers, editors, scholars and other specialists, co-authors, and reviewers are arranged in folders alphabetically by title of publication. Within folders materials are arranged chronologically. The dates and precise nature of the materials vary, but there is a significant amount of correspondence with several scholars providing comments and critiques of Douglas' work. In the case of *Risk and Culture*, copies of the correspondence of Aaron Wildavsky are included. Apart from these materials on specific titles, there is a small quantity of general correspondence (1970-85), a folder of correspondence concerning reprint permissions (1978-83), and a folder of correspondence on Douglas's relationship with the Russell Sage Foundation. There are also valuable notes and correspondence on pollution, a concept with which she dealt in several of her works. Related materials will be found in the folder of notes on "Leviticus XI."

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Provenance: Mary Douglas donated her papers to the Northwestern University Archives on April 15, 1983 (Accession # 83-38); June 24, 1985 (Accession # 85-109); and July 19, 1985 (Accession # 85-132).

Restrictions: None.

Processor: Jean Alexander; April 23, 1986.

Updated, Scanned and Reformatted, June 2007

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Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	1	Biographical Materials	1981
		African Research Materials	
	2	General Correspondence	1949-68
	3	Ngokwey Ndolamb Correspondence	1972-77
	4	Ngokwey Ndolamb Manuscripts	c. 1972-76
		Research Notes	1949-53
	5	Age Sets	
	6	Animals	
	7	Chiefs	
	8	Ecology and Population (1)	
	9	Ecology and Population (2)	
	10	Language	
	11	Medicine	
	12	Religion	
2	1	Social, Cultural, Political (1)	
	2	Social, Cultural, Political (2)	
	3	Techniques	
		Journals	c. 1949-1953
	Volume 1	Field Notes (1)	1953
	Volume 2	Field Notes (2)	1953
	Volume 3	Language Notes (1)	n.d.
	Volume 4	Language Notes (2)	n.d.
	Volume 5	Reading Notes (in French) (1)	n.d.
	Volume 6	Reading Notes (in French) (2)	n.d.
	Volume 7	Reading Notes (in French)	n.d.
3		Theses	
	Volume 1	"Bride Wealth in Africa" (B.S., Oxford)	1948
	Volume 2	"A Study of the Social Organization of the Kasai" (Ph.D., Oxford)	1952
		Publications	
	1	General Correspondence	1970-85
	2	Darryll Forde Obituary Notes	1973
	3	<i>Essays in the Sociology of Perception</i> , Correspondence	1979-83
4	1	<i>Edward Evans-Pritchard</i> , Correspondence	1961-79
	2	<i>Edward Evans-Pritchard</i> , Correspondence	1980-84
	3	<i>Edward Evans-Pritchard</i> , Manuscript, pp. 1-93	1980

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4	4	<i>Edward Evans-Pritchard</i> , Manuscript, pp. 94-178	1980
	5	<i>Edward Evans-Pritchard</i> , Galley Proofs	1980
	6	<i>Implicit Meanings</i> , Reviews	1975-77
	7	<i>In the Active Voice</i> , Correspondence	1978-84
5	1	<i>In the Active Voice</i> , Drafts and Offprints	1962-72
	2	<i>In the Active Voice</i> , Offprints	1973-77
	3	<i>In the Active Voice</i> , Offprints	1979-82
	4	<i>Lele of the Kasai</i> , Correspondence	1977-85
	5	"Leviticus XI" Notes	c. 1959
	6	<i>Natural Symbols</i> , Correspondence	1982
	7	<i>Natural Symbols</i> , Reviews	1970-80
	8	Pollution, Notes	n.d.
	9	Pollution, Correspondence	1953-80
6	1	<i>Purity and Danger</i> , Correspondence	1966-80
	2	<i>Religion in America</i> , Reviews	1982-84
	3	Reprint Permission Correspondence	1978-84
	4	<i>Risk Acceptability According to the Social Sciences</i> , Correspondence	1983-85
	5	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Correspondence	1979-80
	6	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Correspondence	Jan.-Feb. 1981
	7	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Correspondence	March-Aug. 1981
	8	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Correspondence	Sept.-Dec. 1981
	9	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Correspondence	1982-85
	10	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Reviews	1982
	11	<i>Risk and Culture</i> , Reviews	1983-84
7	1	<i>Rules and Meanings</i> , Correspondence	1973-81
	2	Russell Sage Foundation, Correspondence	1976-82
	3	<i>The World of Goods</i> , Notes and Drafts	1967-77
	4	<i>The World of Goods</i> , Correspondence	1977-78
	5	<i>The World of Goods</i> , Correspondence	1979-84
	6	<i>The World of Goods</i> , Reviews	1979-82