

# SUMMARY

## **(Post)Colonial Making of Jamaica: Ethnography of Social Mobility**

This book attempts an anthropological, critical look at shaping, or as in the title, “making” ideas about social statuses and accompanying practices resulting from the Anglo-British colonization of Jamaica. I treat coloniality and post-coloniality as a continuum describing the creation and reproduction of contemporary rules and phenomena related to the functioning of state power, based conceptually on the discourses of public culture. Postcolonialism is a consequence of coloniality and, in my opinion, describes the dynamic situation in which the modern world finds itself, regardless of the formal status of societies and states, whether they were colonized or have been colonized. Both during and after colonization, significantly racialized images generated at various levels of public culture influenced the identities and social relations on the Island and the attitude of opinion-forming circles of the British Empire, and then the “Western world”, towards the colony and individual sections of its society. They also influenced the diverse, often ambiguous attitude of Jamaicans towards themselves and their country, as well as social and state institutions.

The variety of perspectives and approaches presented here results both from attempts to implement the postulates of multi-sited ethnography and from the scope and nature of the research I conduct in specific contexts. At the same time, it is the outcome of the search for a form that best reflects my considerations and doubts regarding social mobility. Driven by the need to understand and explain the mechanisms that have been shaping the relations between an individual, society, and the state over the centuries, my thoughts moved from localized investigations, perceived as typically ethnographic, towards ethnohistorical analyses and ethnography of the state in certain manifestations of its impact on the lives and status of people co-creating its society.

This book is the result of research conducted in 2008–2011 and continued until 2022. The original pretext for it was provided by Professor Aleksander Posern-Zieliński who suggested me to organize something of a ‘field revisit’ to Jamaica, to the places where Józef Obrębski conducted research in the 1940s as part of the West Indian Social Survey (WISS). The memory of this forgotten fieldwork by this Polish researcher, from which he published almost no findings, has been restored by Professor Anna Engelking. Over the years, she has carefully found traces of all aspects of his rich scientific activity and, through her studies and interpretations, given them their due importance (see Engelking 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2012). Obrębski’s research was a point of reference for comparisons on the social and cultural changes taking place in Jamaica, but my research, as reflected in this book, had a broader scope and resulted in observations also regarding topics not discussed by WISS researchers, as well as those that became relevant in the period after the end of the WISS project.

In the individual chapters of this book, using selected examples, I tried to show how relations in Jamaican society are influenced by interpretations of specific ideas about social status and the effect of the state (Mitchell 1999).

In the first chapter, I explain my understanding of social and spatial mobility and social statuses, trying to place these concepts in the anthropological perspective of variability and well-being, linking them with the personal experiences, assessments, and ideas of empowered people and communities that they create in various configurations.

Then, in the second chapter, I deal with the issues of ethnography and terrain concerning certain systemic conditions to which researchers are subject in the perspective of their aspirations, social position, and personal possibilities of changing their social status. As a pretext for these reflections, I adopt a comparative perspective obtained thanks to a field visit to Obrębski’s places of activity in Jamaica as part of the WISS conducted in the second half of the 1940s.

In the chapters that follow, I develop the threads of my research that are important for discussions of social mobility and the creation of Jamaican society. In the third chapter, I briefly highlight my perspective, introducing the issues of social differentiation in Jamaica and its formation in the context of overwhelming public culture’s racial and cultural, or rather racist and culturalist, categories.

The fourth chapter is a commentary on the political system in the post-independence situation of a peripheral country whose authorities were permanently dominated by two warring political blocs. Due to the adoption of the Westminster system of selecting and exercising democratic power with single-member constituencies, for decades both parties have been ruthlessly using all available means to build lasting support in the key, densely populated areas. Patronage-clientelism relations were created, permeating all aspects of social life, in which the support of the electorate was purchased through social transfers, bribery, intimidation, and direct violence from gangs benefiting from political protection (C. Stone 1980, 1994). In this situation, the institutions of the young state did not inspire general trust, and “outlawry” (Harrisson 1988) became a form of developing agency and striving to ensure social status for many people and communities.

This introduction allowed me, in the fifth chapter, to present considerations based on an essay whose original version I wrote with Izabella Parowicz. These relate to the colonial

urban legacy in Kingston and certain ways of perceiving it, which may influence ideas and practices related to self-esteem, identity and social mobility of the inhabitants of the capital metropolitan area of Jamaica.

In the next chapter – the sixth – I look at uneven access to participation in one of the most important sectors of the Jamaican economy, which is tourism. The geographical distribution of activity in this economic area and the way of conducting tourist activities, depending on investment trends, means that the potential for the labor market remains largely unused, and entire areas of the Island's society are omitted in the redistribution of income, even where cooperation and participation of local communities would be possible.

In the seventh chapter, I recapitulate issues related to the perception of social differences, proposing an essay analysis of selected aspects of the use of culturalist, racist, and classist categories of public culture, especially censuses conducted in former English colonies in the Americas. Due to their colonial and imperial origins, they still find resonance and application in administration and economic and social sciences, leading to the petrification of social ideas related to the perception of power relations and the analysis of the social situation, and resulting in the objectification of individuals within arbitrary group categories.

As part of my version of “ethnography of the state”, I tried to focus not so much on individual branches and levels of state institutions (Sharma, Gupta 2006: 9–10), but on trying to recreate certain aspects of the process of shaping ideas that underlie how society and the state operate in practice as “an effect of mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation that create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society or state and economy.” (Mitchell 1999: 95). The state in this approach is a set of factors, a structure that is integrated but full of inconsistencies, reflecting the ideas of its designers, modifiers, reformers, and managers, as well as people creating the state apparatus in all its instances. This “materialization” of ideas in formal-legislative and administrative practices as well as unofficial and unformalized ones that are often implicit or behind the scenes takes place within a certain habitus, which changes under the influence of the personality and agency of its participants with varied kinds of determination and status that condition the effectiveness of actions undertaken at different levels of the state. Images, values, plans, and aspirations arise from the social habits of actors and are supplemented in the process of interpretation, learning from our own and others' experiences, and from observing local and global events. They are constantly confronted with what are considered to be real opportunities, with urgent and long-term needs, which leads to changeable priorities, constant negotiation of actions between the actors, and modifications of plans and methods of their implementation. All this involves extensive social networks of actors that co-create the very infrastructure of the state, on which the quality of operation of any system created and operated by people depends. This, as Florian Znaniecki would say, “humanistic factor”, makes the separation of state and society impossible in practice, although it is possible for people and communities that are objectified or excluded to feel a lack of identity and integrity, or to feel a lack of sufficient influence on the actions of the state.

It is clear to everyone I spoke to that the Jamaican community does not deserve the unfavorable image it has acquired as a result of the brutality of domestic gangs operating in

the United States and at home. “Gangs are a small minority, most of us try to live a normal life, even if it means poverty.” “Look how many people die every day in the US from domestic violence, how many people have guns, and they are warning against us.” “I will not be ashamed of being a Black Jamaican. This is who I am and will be. But they don’t seem to want to know me.” “I didn’t get a visa because I admitted that my girlfriend and our child were in Philadelphia. For them, it meant that we wanted to run away from here forever, but I wanted to have a home here. My parents will give me land with them by the sea. I don’t want to grow old there.” “I would like to do something for my community, but I don’t have a good job here. My aunt found me a job in the United States, but for now, we don’t have enough to show that I have enough in my account (to meet the migration requirements – Ł.K.).” “And this was in Canada, in response to an advertisement that they were looking for a technician. When I spoke on the phone, and they heard my Jamaican English, just a trace of an accent, it was enough for them to decide that they didn’t want me and said that there was no job. Many times. But I’m an engineer, I studied in England. I understood what it meant to be a Black Jamaican. For weeks I stayed in my room and prayed that my countrymen would forgive me the racism of my ancestors.”

The colonial foundations of Jamaican statehood, which are also reminded of by the traces of domination left in the landscape by a disappearing group of European rulers, are for many people an explanation for the current state of the state and society. This is manifested in opinions according to which the colonial West created Caribbean communities subordinated to the ethno-racial stratification of people, and when they could no longer be exploited, abandoned them and left them to their fate. Many of my interlocutors, including those who consider themselves White, claim that the West holds moral responsibility for the poor socio-economic condition of most countries in the Caribbean basin, both in colonial times and today. They believe that Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, France, the USA, and other countries that in the past profited from slavery and economic exploitation of the Caribbean should now become more involved in stimulating its economic and social development. Above all, the former colonialists should cease, once and for all, to perpetuate the image of Caribbean societies as potential migrants, which manifests itself in procedural practices that make it difficult for Jamaicans and their neighbors to travel and work in these countries. For many of them, it is clear that migrations will take place anyway, but it is unfair that they are allowed mainly to better-off or educated people or to those who can be recruited to the lowest-paid and dangerous jobs by companies specializing in the practice of importing workers for short-term contracts. Many of my interlocutors see this as a continuation of colonial stratification, according to which “a Jamaican is Black, and a Black person is not suitable for a well-paid job.” They argue, rightly I think, based on research among Polish migrants living in developed countries, that reducing the restrictiveness of migration regimes would bring great benefits to both Jamaican society and those receiving Jamaican migrants. In this vision, Jamaicans would work legally for a few years, and some for longer, and would send money and saved funds back to the country. They could use the qualifications and experience they acquire creatively in their home country. It might be the case that many people would leave initially, since more Jamaicans currently live as emigrants than in their homeland, but many people would certainly come back with money and new

skills, as is already happening now. They also emphasize that people from Jamaica, although they often did not finish school, still fit in well in English-speaking countries because they do not have to learn the language.

The issues of naming people for censuses and administration, discussed in the example of racial and ethnic categories in the last chapter, illustrate the consistent and most often conscious creation of a racialized image of groups living in countries such as Jamaica or the USA, lasting for centuries. Based on emphasizing differences between groups, counting, categorizing, and naming practices in the cases of Jamaica and the USA also created or strengthened identity referents - they were accepted as names for entire social groups, although not always without resistance or subsequent struggle to change those that were considered derogatory or inadequate. After “naturalization” in the form of linguistic categories, they were used to design administrative and legal infrastructures for managing such created groups and to perpetuate differences in state practices and the discourse of public culture. This, I believe, is one of the most important spheres in which the state effect is produced (Mitchell 1999), as it is responsible for how the “state sees” people it is interested in and shapes the “logic” of designing reciprocal relations between the authorities and society.

I am aware that such a selection of the content discussed here does not allow for a closer look at many important aspects of social mobility. However, I hope that the effect of reading this book will be to bolster many readers’ criticism of overly one-dimensional explanations of social phenomena and to strengthen their belief in the need to conduct research using a multi-sited perspective (e.g. Marcus 2004), which allows us to draw attention to aspects and contexts that often ignored or not studied in sufficient depth in social studies carried out using statistical methods. The cognitive value of ethnographic research results from its diversity and interest in various, often seemingly unexpected, topics and problems.