

Strategies and Problems Among Economic Elites in Jamaica: The Evolution of a Research Focus

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article passe en revue les avantages et les inconvénients de l'observation par participation comme moyen de recueillir des données sur l'élite nationale des entrepreneurs en Jamaïque. On note aussi certains des problèmes, des conflits et des dilemmes que le chercheur a rencontrés sur le terrain. L'article conclut avec des remarques sur les responsabilités du chercheur vis-à-vis les sujets de l'étude.

There are still relatively few detailed ethnographies of "elite" populations.¹ For the most part, anthropologists have not "studied up" (Nader 1972). But the elite often play *dominant* roles in the political, economic and cultural affairs of the society. Thus, the paucity of studies on the dimensions of elite wealth, the networks of elite influence, the nature of elite cohesion and the characteristics of elite social organization makes for a rather narrow appreciation of the dynamics of power in complex societies.

Anthropologists can make unique contributions to the study of elites in society. This is primarily because of the method by which we gather a substantial portion of our data. The method is known as "participant observation" and stipulates that we must take an

¹ Some of the better known exceptions include: Gold (1975); González (1974); Karner (1969); Kovats-Beaudoux (1969); Leach and Mukherjée (1970); Leeds (1964) and Scheele (1956).

active part in the culture we are studying. Not only must we observe the behaviour of a community over an extended period of time, but we must also simultaneously participate in its social life (Freilich 1970). By stepping into the roles of those we study, we can experience and appreciate reality as our informants do. And, because we inevitably remain as "marginal natives" only periferally accepted and included, we can better perceive "those relationships, systems, and patterns of which an inextricably involved ... insider is not likely to be consciously aware" (Wax 1973: 3). Participant observation qualitatively enriches ethnographic research.

In general, there has been little published on the anthropology of dominant groups. Instead of thick descriptions of the "powerful", there are concentrated efforts to document the "powerless". While these studies are important for their elaborations of traditional ethnographic concerns — family and kinship relations, religious behaviour and beliefs, symbol systems, subsistence activities, community leadership and the like — they are by no means sufficient for the formulation of models of complex socio-cultural systems. This is true inspite of the fact that Malinowski (1930) and Gluckman (1940) both pointed out how traditional peoples could not be understood without taking into account their relations with the national level colonial administrators who governed them.

While ethnographies of elites are rare, those that do exist focus neither on the political economy of national elite power nor on the social and cultural consequences of this power as it relates to the non-elite majority segment. In addition, we lack systematic investigations of the structures and organizations that qualitatively differentiate the elites from the non-elites. These structures and organizations must be comprehended in order to understand the cultural matrix within which elite distinctiveness becomes manifest. There is a paucity of information on the nature of elite interrelations, institutional roles, networks of mutual self-help, conflicts, competitions, values and attitudes. And because of this informational gap, we are unfamiliar with the extent to which those in control of a society's major economic resources, influence the political decision-making that sets major situational contexts for the non-elite majority.

It was to begin to answer these questions that I undertook an examination of the political economy of the Jamaican "national

entrepreneurial elite",² with a special interest in the economic role and political participation of Jamaica's Jewish population (Holzberg 1977a). In 1974-75, the Jews constituted about 25 per cent of the personnel involved in the upper level organization, direction, and finance of those companies quoted on the Jamaica Stock Exchange. This was significant for two reasons: 1) the Stock Exchange Companies were reputed to be among the largest companies in the country, and 2) there were less than 500 Jews in Jamaica and the community as a whole made up less than 1 per cent of the total population.

Research on both the Jews and the national entrepreneurial elite — their business strategies, political and institutional affiliations, extended social networks, values, and cultural distinctiveness — was carried out first as a summer pilot study in 1973, and then again more extensively from January 1974 to February 1975.³ A return visit was made from May through August of 1978.⁴ The plan of this paper⁵ is to discuss the methodological framework that guided the research and elaborate upon the strategies of data collection that facilitated or complicated gathering information in a complex society. To this end, the paper also considers the more personal problems and conflicts the researcher experienced while conducting investigations among an economically advantaged segment of an economically disadvantaged population. The fact that the ethnographer was a young "unattached" female at times amplified the difficulties. The paper concludes with a general discussion of the responsibilities that are shared by fieldworkers irrespective of the gender identity of the researcher, the setting of the research, or the population segment being studied.

² Political economy refers to the "dynamic and mutually shaping *interrelationship*" (Cardoso 1973: 142) between economics and politics. The Jamaican national entrepreneurial elite are made up of individuals who sat on three or more Boards of Directors for companies quoted on the Jamaica Stock Exchanges for 1971 and 1974.

³ This portion of the research was funded by grants from the Canada Council, the Ministry of Education — Québec, the Canadian Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

⁴ Summer work in 1978 was facilitated by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

⁵ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Caribbean Studies Association meetings in Trinidad in January 1977. I would like to thank my colleagues Ros Vanderburgh and Janice Boddy for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

THE EVOLUTION OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

What eventually culminated in a doctoral dissertation (Boston University 1977a) on the political economy of Jamaica's "national entrepreneurial elites" began with a more traditional pilot study of Jamaica's Jewish community (Holzberg 1976). An investigation of the social organization, business activities, and political influence of Jamaica's Jewish population seemed like a relevant beginning because Jewish participation in island big business was reputed to be significant. Jamaica's Jews were also worthy of focus for another reason as well. They were locally perceived as *white* elites⁶ and my interest in the relationship between economic power and political influence required an investigation of "white" economic power and the degree to which the members of the white minorities were in positions of politico-economic dominance. Though constitutional independence from Great Britain had effected a major redistribution of formal political power in Jamaican society — blacks were being elected and appointed to the majority of positions in the Senate and the Cabinet⁷ — Jamaicans believed that the economy of the country was still largely in the hands of the white minorities. As the friendship, kinship, economic and political networks of the Jewish businessmen extended into the other white minority segments such as the Lebanese/Syrian, whites of European descent, and expatriate whites, an examination of the Jewish community would shed light on the political influence of white economic elites in general.

The pilot study was precipitated by an interest in "local" big business, and a research proposal to investigate the social composition and resource base of those native personnel in charge of organizing, directing, and financing large scale national economic ventures, i.e. the national entrepreneurial elite. But during the summer, I concentrated mainly on gathering data for an ethnography of Jamaica's Jewish community. Information on social organization, extra-community networks, ethnic markers, profes-

⁶ Jewish presence on the Island dates back to the 17th century. Since their arrival, Jews have intermarried such that today a significant number of the community show evidence of African and Chinese ancestry.

⁷ Rodney (1975: 17) suggests that this pattern is typical of the British West Indies. He writes: "Throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, the pattern is that a predominantly African (and mulatto) professional, beaucratic and careerist political element has strategic control over the state."

sional occupations, self-perceptions, and class membership was collated. Thus most of the examples I had of economic elite activity derived from the business activities, social interaction and cultural values of the Jewish population segment. However not all members of the Jewish community were economic elites, and in order to map the political economy of local big business in general it became conceptually imperative to widen the ethnographic focus. This meant gathering information on more than just a single ethnic enclave. I planned to extend the data base when I returned to the field again in January 1974.

I was interested in expanding the ethnographic data base for another reason as well. As it became evident that by such indicators as level of education, conspicuous consumption, multiple occupations, business and social networks, and access to foreign exchange 1) many Jamaican Jews could be identified as economic elites, 2) the majority of the Jewish families were members of the propertied class and 3) Jews were disproportionately represented in Jamaica's privileged social segment, I became apprehensive about the possible effects the study might have on the well-being of my informants. If the research findings were taken out of context, the study would provide the "system" with a convenient scapegoat upon which to blame contemporary social inequalities. This in turn might provoke anti-semitism and lead to acts of violence against individual Jews.

These fears were not entirely alarmist since Jamaica had experienced episodic waves of racial violence against the Chinese in the 1920's and the 1960's (Carnegie 1973) and social discrimination against the Lebanese/Syrians as late as the 1950's. Furthermore, cases of violent anti-Jewish feeling were common historically in the pogroms of nineteenth century Europe. As Aris points out:

For centuries it has been the economic activities of the Jews that have been seized upon by the anti-Semites and used as a stick with which to beat them. The idea of the Jew as usurer and moneylender is so entrenched in popular mythology that even as respectable an authority as the Oxford Dictionary defines the Jew first as a "person of the Hebrew race" and secondly as an "extortionate usurer, a driver of hard bargains". "to jew", the dictionary says, "is to cheat, to overreach" (1970: 14).

The Jews in Jamaica were a powerful minority, disproportionately represented in the upper echelons of the country's big business sector. They enjoyed a high standard of living relative to the black majority. Their superordinate position however, was not

on account of their "Jewishness" *per se*. Rather, their success derived from a series of social historical factors. Some of these factors include their early presence on the Island in the mid-sixteenth century, civil and political discrimination until 1831 which forced them to band together as a community, and a pursuit of economic activities such as merchandising and commission agencies since they were not permitted to own more than 3 slaves in the pre-emancipation period (Holzberg 1976). At the turn of the twentieth century many of the Island's wholesalers and retailers expanded from merchandising to manufacturing. The Jews as part of the mercantile community followed suit. They were members of a larger white Jamaican business class.

METHOD OF ENTRY

As previously discussed, my investigations of local big business and white economic influence in the Jamaican political arena, began with an ethnography of the Jewish community. Theoretically, it could have begun with an ethnography of the whites of European descent or the Lebanese/Syrians because the participation of these "white" minorities in local big business was also reputed to be significant. However, for practical reasons I focused on the Jews. This was because I am Jewish and felt that a commonality of backgrounds would facilitate my entry into the white business environment.

Prior to my arrival I wrote letters to the rabbi, advising him of my interest in Jamaican Jewish history and of my intent to do research in the community during the summer. I also inquired about accommodation within a Jewish home. I pointed out that it had come to my attention that members of the community were ranked among the "most successful" and "well respected" citizens of the country and that my research would document how they had come to achieve such a position of social and economic prominence. I emphasized my awe and appreciation of the community's ability to sustain a vibrant and dynamic Jewish identity inspite of four hundred years of contact with non-Jews. In addition, I was very careful to point out that I too was Jewish.

It is clear that being Jewish facilitated my initial entrée into the Jewish community as a student fieldworker. But being Jewish made

me somewhat apprehensive in my initial contacts with the Lebanese/Syrian community. This anxiety receded as I came to understand the nature of Jewish-Lebanese relations on the island. Both Jews and Lebanese shared a commonality of interests that revolved around their similar business operations, common semitic heritage and, not infrequently, intermarriage. These ties were reinforced by Israel's political decision to aid the Lebanese Christians in Lebanon's civil war. As Jamaica's Lebanese community was of Christian descent, the general political conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the Middle East did not hamper my involvement with the Jamaican "Arab" population. A person interested in conducting research among Jamaica's Lebanese/Syrians would not necessarily have to be of Middle Eastern extraction though the ability to speak Arabic would be a distinct advantage.

An elderly Jewish couple responded to the rabbi's announcement of my arrival and arranged to have me live with them during the summer. My landlady told me that before I arrived her next door neighbor seemed apprehensive about taking in a boarder sight unseen. Mrs. M. assured me that she had informed her neighbour that there was no cause for alarm. After all, I came with a recommendation from the rabbi and that meant I was a "nice Jewish girl" from the United States.

The Jews were more than willing to detail their "prominent" and "progressive" roles in the island's political economy because they believed that they had been consistently overlooked in Caribbean history books. They invited me to their homes, took me on their week-end excursions to the country, invited me to their parties and family get togethers, and introduced me to their friends because they saw me as a chronicler of their achievements and contributions. I was identified as a social scientist who would set down their charitable contributions in print before the community totally disappeared from the island due to emigration, intermarriage and assimilation. But not all members of the community were equally receptive to my questions. Some were afraid the study would encourage anti-semitism and cause friction between the Jews and the non-Jews in the country. In fact, it took about nine months (out of a total of 18 months) of participant observation in the community before the secretary of the United Congregation of Israelites released the synagogue membership lists to me. He was appre-

hensive of some indeterminate calamity that might befall the members of the community "if the list got into the wrong hands"⁸.

It is patently clear to anthropological fieldworkers that the nature of their research problem and their chosen methods of data collection will inevitably affect the general strategy of professional behaviour in the field and will unmistakably condition the kinds of information they are able to retrieve⁹. Furthermore, as anthropologists must often submit their research proposals to the host government, local university, and / or the community before entry visas are granted (Smith 1975: 9), it is often necessary for the fieldworkers to stress the "harmless" intent of their investigations (Barnes 1967: 199). I was worried that "my" community would misinterpret my research objectives and so I was always certain to emphasize the cultural, historical, and more traditional ethnographic aspects of the study while underplaying my interest in matters specifically political and economic. I was guided by the assumption that individuals might be less accommodating if they perceived the political and economic focus as threatening to their prominent social reputation. They relaxed when I assured them that I would not be disclosing any names or information received in confidence.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF JAMAICA'S NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ELITE: FURTHER METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Jamaica's Jews constituted less than one per cent of the total island population. It would have been intellectually myopic to ignore the larger population segment of which they formed a part or to gloss over the political and economic institutions which favoured their prominence and successful achievements. As it turned out, less than twenty-five percent of the national entrepreneurial elite was Jewish (that is 9 men out of 38). Though this figure was significant and raised questions about disproportionate Jewish achievements, it was evident that other individuals or ethnic-racial

⁸ This kind of suspicion was evident to Aris (1970) in his study of the Jews in England. He points out how English Jews have preferred to maintain a low profile: "It is never good when Jews is news" (1970: 11).

⁹ See Henry (1969) and Manners and Steward (1954) for further elaboration of this idea.

segments besides the Jews were represented among the island's economic elite. By high-lighting the extent to which Jamaica's white population in general exerted control over the economic and political affairs of the country, the study would transcend the limitations of a single community focus and document the national institutional frameworks that cut across ethnic and racial segments. This released me from the fear that because I had cited the Jews as my example of Jamaica's "typical" economic elite, others would use them as a scapegoat. The research orientation had therefore shifted from being narrowly ethnic specific to a more general investigation of those persons who directed 3 or more companies quoted on the Jamaica Stock Exchange¹⁰.

The Jamaica Stock Exchange was selected as a focal point because the companies quoted were reputed to be the largest economic concerns on the Island, only second in scope and scale to the bauxite and sugar multinational interests. Annual reports and lists of directorates were secured from the forty companies quoted on the Exchange in 1971 and 1974. Companies were categorized in terms of gross function, that is, financial (including banks and insurance companies) vs. non-financial (including manufacturing, industrial, construction, real estate development, etc.). These in turn were ranked in terms of sales turnover. Sales turnover was chosen as the major indicator of size instead of declared profits because of the tendency of the corporations to channel their profits into internal purchases and dividends or reinvest their profits in plant improvements, physical expansion, new equipment, and the acquisition of subsidiaries. Often a company's annual report would show a decrease in profits for the fiscal year, leading to a suspension of dividends, while at the same time showing a simultaneous capital outlay of millions of dollars for corporate expansion and rationalization. When the companies were ranked in terms of sales, the scale of their activities correlated with their scope (level of diversification). In other words, those companies with the highest sales turnover tended to be the most diversified as well.

A comparison of the forty companies quoted in 1974 with the forty companies quoted in 1971 added time depth to the study. This

¹⁰ The companies quoted are incorporated locally and for the most part are chaired and directed by native born Jamaicans.

diachronic emphasis was particularly necessary in order to determine the extent to which the People's National Party (PNP) had effected changes in the organization of corporate wealth, resources, and personnel since its advent to power in 1972. This question became all the more critical in 1974, when the PNP under the leadership of Prime Minister Manley declared an end to capitalism and began implementing a program of Democratic Socialism. Would the new political ideology lead to an attrition in the expansion of corporate concentration, protected markets, profit margins, interlocking directorates, government subsidies or foreign investment?

In order to determine the nature of change within the national economic sector, it was also important to examine the social characteristics of the company directors¹¹, that is to classify these individuals in terms of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, their country of birth, educational attainment, club memberships religious affiliation, family connections on the Stock Exchange company boards, and professions (skills) held in addition to being corporate executives. Were the "most active" directors (the ones who sat on the most boards) members of a socially cohesive class fraction? Did the national entrepreneurial elite operate as an effective lobby against state intervention in the national economy? Did the politico-administrators make unofficial use of the skills, talents, expertise, and connections of its most active national entrepreneurs by appointing these businessman as advisors and consultants to government? By gathering data on these questions, I was able to document the relationship between Democratic Socialism and large-scale local big business.

If in fact the national entrepreneurial elite and its private sector interests were to be made more socially relevant and responsible to the needs and welfare of the Jamaican population, would the directors of large-scale corporations continue to be recruited from a small segment of the population? Would this business elite continue to occupy such nominated and appointed para-political positions as chairmen of statutory boards, commissioners of inquiry, diplomats and "trouble shooters" in government negotiations for corporate

¹¹ I have written about this elsewhere (Boston University, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1977a). See also Munroe (1975) Phillips (1977) and Reid (1977) for further information.

"Jamaicanization".¹² If changes had in fact taken place, favouring black majority participation while restraining white involvement, one would not expect the white minorities to be so disproportionately represented in the higher circles of Jamaican big business.

My findings support the conclusion that the presence of the national entrepreneurial elite is institutionalized within Jamaican political economy despite the politico-administrative and formal ideological shift to Democratic Socialism. The national entrepreneurial elite are differentiated from the rest of the Jamaican population by phenotype — they are for the most part white — and by their degree of access to and control over a diversified resource base — capital goods and services, foreign investments, employment, foreign exchange and technical expertise. This suggests that white economic power is entrenched even though it may be "un-official". Jamaica's white minorities are still in a position to exert influence, (sometimes as individuals and sometimes as representatives of their corporate interests) in national political administration and policy legislation (Holzberg 1977b).

The power of the white businessmen in Jamaica will continue as long as their corporations make significant contributions to the national economy. These contributions have increased in scale and scope since the industrial expansion of the late 1940's and despite the advent to power of the new socialist administration.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF ELITE RESEARCH

a. *Holism*

A study of Jamaica's national entrepreneurial elite is primarily an ethnography of a particular segment of the Jamaican population set within the context of the larger society of which it forms a part. The dimensions of the ethnography entailed 1) collecting information on the values, personnel and social organization of the particular segment (community) and 2) describing the economic base (corporations) and the politico-economic relations (advisory capacities, para-political appointments) of the segment in relationship to the wider society. Together, both aspects of the research

¹² Jamaicanization refers to the localization of corporate ownership, that is, acquiring majority equity in foreign firms negotiated through purchase.

were to form a holistic picture of the personnel and institutions of Jamaican big business while yielding an adequate description of elite boundaries, that is, the mechanisms of recruitment and the restrictions for membership.

Previous studies of elite populations in Curaçao (Karner 1969) and Puerto Rico (Scheele 1956) were not sufficiently holistic. First, they took "eliteness" for granted, glossing over the political and economic factors which afforded their populations elite status. This made it extremely difficult to grasp the critical dimensions of elite power and resources. Second, both Karner and Scheele also neglected to detail the methodological problems and personal ambivalences they experienced while conducting their research among elites. This is unfortunate because it detracts from the "holistic" presentation of the entire field experience. The methodology for mapping the socio-cultural and politico-economic dimensions of Jamaica's national entrepreneurial elite has been outlined in the preceding sections of this paper. The rest of the paper will therefore address some of the more personal frustrations encountered while doing "elite" research and will raise questions about the moral responsibilities of the fieldworkers to informants.

b. *Chronic Culture Shock*

The shift in the focus of the research from an examination of the roles and participation of the Jews in the national economy (ethnic specific) to an examination of the roles and participation of the national entrepreneurial elite (non-ethnic specific) had the advantage of not only safeguarding my informants' identities but also of incorporating a wider range of information on a particular social class. No amount of widening the ethnographic context however, could temper the fact that in Jamaica certain population segments became rich and influential only to the extent that others did not. The propertied minorities seemed to live well only because the majority lived so poorly. The unofficial minimum wage stood at J 25 cents an hour in 1974. Status and prestige rankings were based on the level of conspicuous consumption, the number of servants in the household, taking extended business vacations, shopping abroad, and devoting time to charitable activities. Differences in class membership correlated with inequalities of access to health and sanitary facilities, education, housing, electricity, and other institu-

tional goods and services. The poor appeared trapped in a system which afforded them little opportunity for upward social mobility.

The more information I gathered on the nature of elite resources, networks and consumption differentials, the more I perceived differences in the standard of living between rich and poor. My informants, however, explained poverty in terms which "blamed the victim". They characterized the poor as indolent, ignorant, irresponsible, unmotivated, oversexed, and unskilled. Not only were the majority of the lower class illiterate they claimed, but they were perceived as being uneducatable for "no matter how many times you tell them something or show them how to do things, they never do it right". As an anthropological fieldworker, I diligently recorded these exclamations, in order to appreciate the country from the elite point of view. But in terms of my own personal feelings, I often felt very uncomfortable with responses that designated the majority of the Jamaican population as lazy and promiscuous ("they breed like flies").

This personal ambivalence or negative reaction to my informants' responses left me with a perpetual "disturbing feeling of disorientation and helplessness" (Bock 1970: ix) — a sort of chronic culture shock characterized by alienation, frustration, and a constant awareness of the difficulties involved in carrying out an objective, unbiased, and dispassionate ethnography of economic elites. These feelings persisted as I carried out "participant observation" immersing myself in as many elite situational contexts as possible. Jamaica's national motto "Out of Many, One People" was about as metaphorically real as the American myth of the "melting pot". And, as already mentioned many of my informants equated class and colour in an inverse relationship with intelligence, achievement, motivation, morality, abilities, capabilities, and potentialities.

c. Presentation of Self

I fundamentally disagreed with many of the attitudes and values of my elite informants, but I tried not to project these feelings. I constantly avoided sending out cues which could be interpreted as non-sympathetic. I hesitated to disclose that I had crossed the class-colour line by being friendly with those often scornfully described as "butus", radicals, communists, "monkey", and "Quashee". And, in order to get them to elaborate upon their

views, I would sometimes offer verbal reinforcements. It was not only because being at variance would have resulted in being socially outcast, but also that I was afraid of being dismissed as an ivory tower academic (like those “bearded radicals at the University of the West Indies”) or as a “young and naive” female student. I was accepted by the elites and reinvited to their social gatherings precisely because I was thought to have such a “balanced, intelligent, and mature point of view for such a young woman”.

Aside from the value conflicts, other problems consistently arose. On a student fellowship with limited funds available for wardrobe and cosmetics, I was anxious about the acceptability of my appearance. Elite research required that I be smartly attired and stylishly well-groomed in informal as well as formal social settings.¹³ An excerpt from my journal written in preparation for the summer fieldwork project in 1978 will illustrate these feelings even though I was no longer a graduate student.

In conducting the appropriate fieldwork preparations I have been taking extra-special care of my nails for the last four weeks... I have been trying to eliminate the jaundiced academic complexion by tanning in the sun for 15 — 20 minute intervals. I think it is important to look healthy and “unneglected”... I’ve had to break in a new pair of wedgie sandals, to learn how to walk in them for long periods of time and at fast speeds. The wedge makes it difficult to run, I’ve become prone to tripping and turning my ankle. These shoes will be a hindrance in mountain climbing, walking through mud or bush, and chasing after or running away from people... In order to achieve an appearance of elegance, I have dyed a blouse, reinforced torn hems, and packed away my best jewellery. My suitcase is now 30 pounds overweight and all my clothes are so crumpled and crinkled I hope Mrs. C. doesn’t mind if I rush over and use her iron just as soon as I arrive (May 30, 1978).

A sloppy appearance was tantamount to being unfeminine. Yet in the tropics, under adverse conditions of heat and humidity, I always seemed to wilt. The “ladies” were always telling me to do something about my hair or to put on a bit more makeup. My male informants however never objected to the way I looked. Interestingly enough, as I did not spend all of my time with Jews or members of the economic elite, dressing like a rich white woman often made me highly visible amidst other segments of the popula-

¹³ It is clear that one of the major reasons why the Jewish community voiced collective disapproval of its young new rabbi and his wife was because they frequently appeared in public very informally and inappropriately attired. The rabbi’s contract was not renewed after his 9 months of office.

tion. To the lower classes, my "elite" appearance reinforced my image of not belonging.

d. *Situational Ambiguities and Conflicts*

Equally frustrating and tension-causing conflicts developed when I found myself participating in ambiguous situational contexts. Members of the Jewish community had told me time and time again not to ask any of the Lebanese/Syrians questions about their loyalties in the Middle East conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs. They were afraid that these sorts of questions might jeopardize their amicable relations with their Lebanese/Syrian friends. So when interviewing Lebanese/Syrian businessmen and the prominent women of the Lebanese/Syrian community, I always avoided bringing up the subject of the Middle East war. Similarly, when greeting my non-white friends while in the company of elites, I had to refrain from appearing overly friendly for fear of having to explain how I had come to know "those people". This also meant that I had to be careful of whom to invite to my home as many of my elite informants had an open invitation to drop in and visit at any time.

There were many dimensions to these personal conflicts that made fieldwork not only problematic but also challenging. Maintaining an optimum balance between compromise and principles was never easy. I came to realize that participant observation is often imbued with a degree of covert research in that for expedience sake (so as not to offend anyone), the fieldworker can make only limited disclosures about the inventory of data collected. Sometimes these anxieties would translate into dreams of being arrested for engaging in revolutionary (counter-revolutionary?) subversion, of making news headlines as Jamaica's first *anthropologist non grata*, or being quietly disposed of one night in the gully of a lone country road. These dreams were precipitated by dividing my time among elites and the poor, by participating in mutually antagonistic life styles, and by coming to realize the nature of unequal access to Jamaica's social and material resources.

CONCLUSIONS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL HUMANISM AND THE ETHICS OF ELITE RESEARCH

In preparation for the fieldwork, my professors constantly reminded me that my behaviour in Jamaica would reflect upon

anthropologists in general and would inevitably be a decisive factor in granting entry permission to successive fieldworkers. I was told to be subtle and discreet as well as polite, to treat informant responses with utmost confidentiality, to avoid passing moral judgments, and not to reveal informant identities. My job was to be that of a system's analyst, not trouble maker. But research on the social organization and politico-economic activities of a society's business elite is neither the most "harmless" nor "neutral" scientific focus — especially as it touches on the often quite sensitive topics of inequalities of wealth, power and privilege. Probing for the dimensions of power often yields data which contradict the images elites have of themselves or those they attempt to convey through their coverage in the media. In addition, elite values, attitudes, and behaviours may sometimes be in conflict with those of the fieldworker.

The paper has examined some of the conflicts, ambiguities, and personal ambivalences experienced by this researcher in the investigation of Jamaica's Jewish community and its national entrepreneurial elite. By elaborating on the strategies that facilitated data collection and outlining the problems encountered, the paper humanizes the fieldwork experience. As Casagrande indicates, most anthropological writings are so,

concerned with cultural patterns and norms, we are accustomed in articles and monographs to treat our data at a highly abstract level several stages removed from the vividness and immediacy of what we have experienced in the field. In our published work remarkably little is vouchsafed about personal reactions to the vicissitudes of field work and to the people among whom we have lived and worked (1960: xii).

This is an unfortunate gap in the literature, a gap which this paper has attempted to bridge.

While I found particular aspects of the fieldwork ideologically frustrating, it must be pointed out that I have established enduring friendships with many of my "elite" informants. Without their patience and assistance, this study would never have been done. Thus in setting down an operational model to facilitate future studies of elite minorities, it is perhaps best to keep in mind that members of the upper class are just as much the victims of a series of limited alternatives as members of the lower class. That the quality and degree of their victimization are different does not negate the fact that they too must operate in response to situational pressures and life crises. As individuals they are not consciously out

to harm their employees, nor are they motivated solely by self-gain. Recognizing their humanity does not compromise moral principles. Rather, it makes for a "more objective" analysis of their roles and positions in society devoid of ideological rhetoric.

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