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Mary Douglas, *Kako mislijo institucije* [How Institutions Think], University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education: 2018; 156 pp.: ISBN: 978-961-253-223-9

Reviewed by METKA KNEŽ¹

This monograph is a Slovenian translation (*Kako mislijo institucije*, 2018) of the original book titled 'How Institutions Think' (Frank W. Abrams Lectures), written by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas. The author published the book in 1986 after she lectured at Syracuse University Press in New York.

Mary Douglas was one of the first women to study social anthropology in the 20th century in the United Kingdom. At that time, women could only be educated for so-called women's professions: nurse, carer, social worker, homemaker, assistant teacher, and similar. Studies in the fields of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, medicine, and research fieldwork were dominated by men. She did not follow the social norms of that time, and she enrolled at the University of Oxford, from which she graduated and obtained a doctorate. Douglas was very devoted to her work, although she was neglected and discriminated against because of her gender. In order to better understand the contents of the book, we must first look at her life and career.

Douglas came from a traditional and conservative family. Her father was employed in the colonial administration, and her mother was from a very devout Catholic family. Her mother died early, so Mary and her sister were taken care of by her father and mother's parents. Mary soon began to attend a monastic school, which was led by Jesuit nuns. Here, for the first time, she encountered the strict orders and the rules of a total institution. Nevertheless, she felt very safe and devoted herself to education and reading the various books that the nuns had.



¹ PhD Candidate at Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; mk7027@student.uni-lj.si.

Afterwards, she enrolled at the University of Oxford, where she attended high school and obtained a master's degree. She then suspended her studies and was employed in the colonial administration for some time during the Second World War, where she felt very homesick because of the work that her father sometimes used to do. After the war ended, she studied social anthropology, learning from the prominent anthropologist Sir E. E. Evans-Pritchard. She then carried out the first fieldwork at the International African Institute in the Belgian Congo. Her work was soon interrupted because she married and dedicated herself to motherhood. In addition to caring for her family, she taught at the University College in London and wrote many interesting books.

Presently, there are three books translated into the Slovenian language: 'Purity and Danger', 1966 (*Čisto in nevarno*, 2010), 'Thought Styles', 1996 (*Miselni slogi*, 1999) and 'How Institutions Think', 1986 (*Kako mislijo institucije*, 2018). Although she wanted lectures with doctorate students, this was not possible for her, due to institutional sexism. In 1977, she went to the United States, where she lived and worked for eleven years. She worked as director of culture research at the Russell Sage Foundation, and in 1981 she moved to Northwestern University as a humanities professor at Avalon Foundation. During this time, she also wrote about how far institutions thought and explored the rise of neoliberalism and related socio-political processes in the United States and the United Kingdom. She noted that American society was much more open to women and their work in society than in the United Kingdom. She was forced to leave and return to her homeland, where she found she could no longer work at a university as a full professor because of her age.

As mentioned, the book was the result of the invitation of the University of Syracuse, where the author delivered a series of six lectures. Upon reading it, we can see that the author connects research work in the field and her personal experiences. When dealing with institutions, she relies on various authors and theories in other disciplines: biology, medicine, sociology, philosophy, and similar. In particular, she relied on the sociological theories of Durkheim, Fleck, and Weber, among others.

In nine chapters, readers are given an overview of the treatment of institutions and the attitudes of society to them in various aspects. In the first chapter, 'Institutions Cannot Have Minds of Their Own', the author shares with us her views on solidarity. She discusses many issues: solidarity in societies, confidence in mutual help, fear, expectations, mistrust, and hatred. She thinks that members of society are contributing rationally to solidarity as far as they think they benefit from it and that they can expect it when they need it. In the next two chapters, titled 'Smallness of Scale Discounted' and 'How Latent

Groups Survive', the author explains how small-scale groups, also referred to as 'latent groups', work. An individual who chooses to be part of a group will contribute to the group for the public good. At the same time, the rules of latent groups are anticipated by the individual to make rational decisions so that they can enjoy what the common good is. At the same time, the potential for exploiting public good is reduced by increasing the number of members of the community. The author explains that each group of the community, especially the small-scale group, operates according to the established group dynamics, in which the individual's interests are subordinated to the common good. She supports her claims with examples of NGOs, the military, and the police, or with different community blocs such as small tribes and sects. According to her, in these groups, the interactions between action, control and the quota are carried out without individuals being forced to comply. The operation of a small-scale group is explained using a functional theory, which explains how group processes within a group are formed, interwoven with the relationships of individuals as members of the group, thus forming a common mindset. In doing so, the author recognises the mechanisms of rules and relocation within a group of participants to whom they must be subordinate, which encourages the members to subordinate themselves to the process of action of the group.

Douglas believes that institutions are founded on analogy. In the fourth chapter, she explains that social grouping depends on justifications in reason and in nature. Many institutions are defined in terms of what the world or nature is really like. For example, schools are seen as institutions that socialise, yet they are also understood as an allocating institution operating under societal rules that allow them to directly confer success and failure in society quite apart from any socialising effects. The institutions also do the classifying for they: "systematically direct individual memories and channel our perceptions into forms that are compatible with the relations they authorise. They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and they rouse our emotions to a standardised pitch on standardised issues '(1986: 92).

We can see that institutions play an important and productive role in our lives. At some point, they can play a repressive role too. Alternatively, vice versa, institutions that are considered repressive can play a productive role in protecting individuals; for example, the police, which is a repressive body, responds to the call of the victim of a violent person who has beaten her or otherwise injured her. When the police arrive at the place of the event, they have the right and the duty to restrain the perpetrator and remove the victim in order to protect them.

However, the role of classification is somewhat different regarding large total institutions, such as prisons, correctional homes that act on the repression of individuals and their elimination, if they do not conform to the rules of the institution or the broader social norms. We know that institutions have the right and the power to decide on the life and death of individuals of the members of society, without them being aware of it. The author explains her thesis in the final chapter 'Institutions Make Life and Death Decisions', with the concept of justice through various examples. The first example of how justice is perceived is how individuals often leave important and unpopular decisions to the institutions, instead preferring to deal with irrelevant things or details. The next example of how justice is perceived is shown through the treatment of individuals who commit an offence or how their actions are otherwise morally disputable in a particular company. A person from a lower class caught stealing will be severely punished while a person from a higher class who may have committed a more serious offence will receive a milder sentence. Furthermore, a person who offends against someone from a higher class will be severely penalised.

The most significant current problem of perceiving justice is that it is perceived through the theory of economics – justice is perceived with the case of social affairs, especially when the government is prosperous and has the ruling class power, capital and means of survival. When there is positive growth, there is enough for all members, although ordinary people have less than those who decide. However, when the crisis arrives, and the austerity measures need to be taken, these measures are first introduced at lower classes of the members in the company, with the promise that these measures will be only temporary. All the while, the ruling layer retains its standard of living and works as it did before the crisis. The researcher, who followed the dynamics of perceived justice and social relations before, during, and after the crisis, expected that members of society who lost their relatives because of hunger will cultivate a reluctance to the ruling class because they did not give them more assistance. However, he was surprised to find that this was not the case, since the members again took up the positions and functions of fulfilling social tasks as before the crisis. In the cases described, the author points out that equity should not be equated with the notion of equality and that the mechanism of institutions works through visible and invisible processes in a way that is followed by all who are part of the institutions or are subordinated to them.

The topic of the presented book is interesting in many ways. It can be used for explaining and understanding the structure and logic of, and also a type of education system in a chosen country. In Slovenia, for example, we have more or less prevailing public education system, financed by the state. The

reason behind it is a strong belief in the public good, shared by the majority of the population² and mirrored in the laws regulating many social subsystems. At every level, our education system is organised in the form of an institution. A common example of the functioning of institutions in the system of education is the recognition of the organisation of a particular school or kindergarten, which is hierarchically oriented. The employees in a school or kindergarten must be subordinated to the system that governs the institution. This can be, on the one hand, stressful for many who differ from the majority in the collective and must decide whether or not to accept the rules and opinions of the majority although system guarantees them certain kind of autonomy in their field of expertise. On the other hand, the same system can be a haven for many employed in the institution, where the logic and the practices of the institutions will be protected when, for example, an appeal or protest arises at the expense of his or her work or the lack of understanding of his or her position in the profession.

In conclusion, Douglas gives a positive and objective view of the institutions that are, in fact, part of every society. At each point of life, we encounter all the members of society. How they affect our lives depends on how we perceive them and in which cultural and environments we are. Although the author of the book itself was marked by exclusion and discrimination in her professional and scientific research, this did not affect her devotion to research, study and writing, thus raising awareness of the professional and general public, leaving an indelible echo on a global and European scale.

2 This can, of course, cause a problem for those who do not share the same opinion and believe that we should have more private schools. We are currently witnessing a political clash regarding the financing of private schools in Slovenia.