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**Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby. 2012. *Enacting Power: The Criminalization of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1760-2012*. Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press. 172 pp. ISBN:978-976-640-315-7.**

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**T**his book was written by two outstanding scholars whose works on Caribbean culture and social history are well known. The title already promises a very interesting study based on an approach to Caribbean social history which uses the enactment of laws as primary data.

Nevertheless, this review finds it necessary to comment on the title. The term “Anglophone” is used in the title to circumscribe the geographical setting of the study. It could seem that the term is quite convenient and appropriate, understood by all, although the precise meaning of “phone” is somewhat vague. Technically, it means “sound” or “voice,” but in “Anglophone,” it has expanded its etymological meaning and now expresses “(native) speaker of.”

The matter becomes unambiguously critical in the opening paragraph of the book where the authors remove any vagueness left in the term “Anglophone” by using “English-speaking” instead. However, neither “Anglophone” nor “English-speaking” is accurate. It may be that the authors wish to uplift the image of these Caribbean countries by attributing to them the ability to speak English; or simply that the convenience of the terms outweighs any inaccuracy in their use. Whatever is the case, it is time that scholars show more understanding and thoroughness of knowledge of the cultural products of the region. Post-colonial adjustments have helped to improve the status of regional religions (e.g. the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad and Tobago), regional music (e.g. reggae, dance-hall of Jamaica), regional medicine (see Payne-Jackson and Alleyne 2000 and the nutraceutical products of Dr. Henry Lowe based on local herbs and roots). Post-colonial discourse must also see to it that the naming of these products makes it clear that they are legitimate expressions of human creativity and production, distinct and different from but equal to any and all of their counterparts across the globe, and that we remove any lingering demeaning denotative or connotative features. In the same way that the religion(s), the music, the foods etc. that emerged in the islands are not the same as their European counterparts, so are their languages. To say that Jamaicans are English-speaking or Anglophone is faulty at best and totally unhelpful to a strict understanding of the people and their language(s). To say that the people of St. Lucia and Dominica are “anglophone (i.e. that English is their native language) is hopelessly wrong. The people of St. Lucia and Jamaica do not in their vast majority have English as their native language. The way to enhance the self-image of the people is not to try to embellish them by using inaccurate even though flattering terms to refer to their cultural products, but to honor these products by first using proper accurate, even though not prestigious, terms.

There are other inverse cases (though also very instructive) having to do with religion where scholars continue to use inaccurate names and do not take time to find more correct and proper terms. The Haitian religion is still spelled by some scholars as “voodoo.” The use of the double “oo” links this word with “boo-boo” (deciphered as “black magic”) and “moo-moo” etc., and contributes to the negative meaning (denotative and

connotative) of this Haitian religion. Consistently using the proper name “Vaudoun” will go a long way in cementing the integrity and legitimacy of the religion. The Jamaican religion which is often called “pocomania” (deciphered by some as “little madness”) has a proper authentic name *pukumina* which should be regaled and honored. Similarly, for example, we must try to cement the use of the term “Haitian” or “le haitien” to refer to the language spoken by Haitians and reject completely the use of exotic irrelevant meaningless terms such as “creole” and “patois” which belong to an earlier time when the prerogative of naming the New (sic) World was enjoyed by the colonizers. This prerogative was mis-used in a euro-centric way to place the colonized forever in the shadow of the colonizer.

The case of “obeah” is very interesting and the authors have to be thanked for expanding and sharpening our understanding of a practice which was sadly vilified and forced to go underground, into hiding, shedding most of its religious base, and to take a path which has led to its downfall. Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004:68) shows how complex the system of folk medical service is/was throughout the history of Jamaica, from the etiology of sickness to categories of medical practitioners to therapeutic approaches. Religion was the fundamental basis for the construction of this system; for example, the ultimate causality for any illness was some offense to God and practitioners had to be able to effectively appease God or call upon His team of deities and spirits to challenge the illness. Obeah was/is not restricted to illness but could/can be used for righting any wrong or improving on one’s station in life and society. European world-view sees “good” and “evil” as being dichotomous and antithetical (e.g. heaven and hell, white magic and black magic). The traditional world-view of Africans and Jamaicans is perhaps more nuanced and subtle; for example the obeahman/woman was called upon to protect the rebellious slaves in their wars with the British and perform acts which would seem to be “evil.” In an earlier work, Bilby (1993:3) characterized obeah as “morally neutral spiritual power.” The book consists of an Introduction, four Chapters, a Conclusion, Notes, References and very useful Index. Chapter 1 recognizes the difficulty of “defining” Obeah and maps its variation over time and space. As far as space is concerned, Chapter 4 which examines the anti-obeah laws of each territory of the “English-speaking” (i.e. English-official) Caribbean does not explicitly or implicitly deal with differences in the form of the practice. It seems however that the form and practice associated with obeah were quite uniform. Each territory is given a sub-section in which the social history and the political-legislative history are presented. The list is comprehensive and is accompanied by a very useful map for those who are not familiar with the geography of the region. But it is

not clear what motivates the order of presentation and why St. Lucia and Dominica were separated. It would have been interesting to learn whether there was any difference in the form and practice of these two territories which are Antillean-speaking and are in a different cultural zone than, say, Jamaica. St. Martin is omitted but is, culturally speaking, close to other territories such as the Virgin Islands.

Chapter 2 gives a comparative overview of anti-obeah provisions in the Laws. As could be suspected, there are no fundamental differences among the territories treated. The laws belonged to the perhaps most impenetrable secure cultural system in which there is no room for influences from the ruled, especially when the ruled were slaves without rights. Chapter 3 (Framing the Development of Anti-Obeah Legislation) states that the laws were being enacted by legal authorities that belonged to the same system governed by one and the same Parliament and Colonial Office. According to the authors (p. 40), “legislators from different territories drew upon a common pool of sources for their understandings, frequently borrowing ideas and language from one another.” In every case, the laws were interpreted in the context of their own interests, not for the protection of all members of the society. They neglected the healing practices of the obeahman/woman and settled only on the “witchcraft” or “sorcery.” By late 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Handler & Bilby, “fraud had become the center-piece of anti-obeah legislation” (p. 18). This also helped to nurture the hostility of the freed socially mobile class toward obeah. However up to today, at least in Jamaica and Trinidad, it is believed that middle class people, including individuals from all the ethnic groups, consult an obeahman/woman to cure some incurable illness or to gain success in many types of endeavor, personal, business, etc.

The system of folk medical practitioners was extremely complex. The book mentions this but does not attempt to add anything beyond what appears in Payne-Jackson & Alleyne (2004). At some point a distinction was made between obeahman and myalman, the former engaged in “witchcraft” and the latter engaged in more religious practices similar to and possibly more acceptable to the political Establishment. To what extent this dichotomy was the product of the Establishment and to what extent it was achieved is not clear. However the fact is that even today in Jamaica, the terms obeahman and obeahwoman refer in some usages to witchcraft and religion and healing. The highly respected heroine, Nanny, is viewed as having had the spiritual powers of an obeahwoman. The book does not make this clear. Did/do the Laws have a gender bias? Or do they simply use “obeahman” as a generic? In addition, the obeahman/woman practiced alone; the myalman operated a church and had a congregation.

In the Conclusion, the authors makes a very strong statement on

what they call the “common, unshifting ideological ground that appears to underlie anti-obeah enactments from different territories and at different periods of time” (p. 102) as well as on the “attempts to use the law to suppress and control ill-defined and often misunderstood expressions of a subaltern worldview.” The conclusion also inveighs against the anti-obeah legislation as “not only the product of oppressive power but also a major factor contributing to the construction and maintenance of cultural hierarchies through which beliefs, practices, and expressions identified as “African” and “black” have continued to be stigmatized and devalued throughout much of the West Indies” (sic). I would also add that this is part of a larger issue, namely the naming of the New World (sic) and the creation of semantic maps which express and reinforce negative valuations of the cultural products of the people of the Caribbean. “Obeah” is one glaring example. The continued use of terms such as “creole,” “patois,” “pidgin,” “nation language,” rather than simply “language” or the adjective of nationality (e.g. Bajan) expressing the equal and legitimate membership of Caribbean popular vernaculars in the rich diversity of the languages of the world is also a similar glaring case which needs to be dealt with urgently.

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**Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds. 2011. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press. 360 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-539442-9**

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For any individual living in the 21st century, ecology—the physical environment and the state of natural resources—is an ever present concern. Within the academic arena many cite the American University as the responsive leader on how people think and engage with ecology via literature. This misleading idea is precisely what Elizabeth