Delgado, Sally J.
Instituto de Estudios del Caribe
San Juan, Puerto Rico

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an obelisk of remembrance” (83). That obelisk hails from the *Voices of Kibuli Country*.


Sally J. Delgado  
English Department, College of Humanities  
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus  
sallyj.delgado@upr.edu

Shaw’s *Everyday life in the Early English Caribbean* is a unique and compelling account of Leeward Island life in the seventeenth century. The author succeeds in her ambitious aim to reanimate the lives of marginalized people in the English colonial system and push the narrative of the dominant elite into the background.

This book contributes to the increasing field of literature that deals with the History of the Atlantic World from the perspective of those people who were subjugated, manipulated, and largely erased from the records. It’s strength lies in the author’s skillful rummaging in and inspection of archival evidence from Caribbean, European and American archives in conjunction with an impressive scope of secondary data in fields as diverse as cultural anthropology, politics, archeology, and religion. For the academic reader, Shaw’s bibliography is well supplemented by an extensive set of endnotes with detailed citations and additional commentary relating to colonial practices and terminology. These indexed research materials permit the author not only to expose and question the fragmentary and often contradictory data, but also to reconstruct plausible connections between them.

The book focuses on servants, slaves, and dissenters whose actions and ideology were integral to the formation of colonial practices but whose voices were manipulated or obscured by the judgments of a privileged few. The accomplishment of this author is not only the recognition of these marginalized people, but also the re-animation of their experiences, thought processes, fears, and ambitions in a way that makes them human again. Thus the book is not only a testament to the archival traces of their lives but is also a memorial to their humanity—an aspect of their
existence that has been all too often ignored.

The organization of the book in six meaty chapters deals largely with populations of Irish workers and African slaves, both men and women, and how they established group identities on Barbados. Yet the distinctive style of this book permits for the emergence of central ‘characters’—all actual people as evidenced by the demographic data—who the author follows through incredible (yet everyday) experiences of life in a colonial plantation. The author reconstructs experiences such as: their emotional and physical agonies in the middle passage; the indignities of sale and indenture; their allegiances and divisions among diverse populations forced to share living and working spaces; the dangers of the workplace; the deliberate masking of religious rites; their anxieties about an unknown future; and the ambitions of those who sought personal gain in a system that was designed to restrain, manipulate and devastate their desires.

The first chapter serves as an introduction for the reader to a diverse island populated by workers of different religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds whose status caused moral anxiety and political debate in England. In addition to its academic merit, this chapter has unanticipated emotive strength in the presentation of the two central ‘characters’ Pegg (a slave born on the island) and Cornelius Bryan (an Irish servant turned Plantation owner). In chapter two Shaw explains how both the slave and the servant were subject to a process of demographic categorization, along with the rest of the diverse population. Yet such historical data, i.e., the collation of the 1678 census of the Leeward Islands, is vividly presented, down to the smell of Governor William Stapleton “melting vermillion sealing wax into a spoon” as he prepares to return the data to London (44).

Chapter three focuses on the workers’ living spaces, described in one of the few documents that actually records their existence, as villages composed of Irish and African sections. Shaw compares the details in travel journals to what is known of the availability of workers’ food and clothing supplies to provide a peek into the realities of mealtme rations and banter among Irish and African workers in rare periods of leisure. She explains, with supporting illustrations, the inherent dangers and necessary collaboration required in the production of sugar, making the point that these distinct groups of workers would have been compelled to communicate and thus likely known each other very well for such mealtime banter to develop.

Chapter four focuses on religious rites and customs that the colonies actively sought to legislate out of existence making the workers equally active to conceal. Shaw chooses to focus on Irish Catholic customs yet also makes some engaging parallels with African cultural practices and
ends the chapter with Pegg’s unique perspective on the African belief that the soul returns to the homeland after death. Born on Barbados as a second-generation slave, Pegg’s notion of ‘homeland’ is ambiguous and speaks to the identity anxiety of all displaced peoples whom the colonial greed for sugar-money exploited. Chapter five covers the logical result of such colonial practices; namely, that institutionalized exploitation on a massive scale leads to resistance, rebellion and conflict. In this chapter, Shaw highlights the agency of African women that has been typically obscured or distorted by the records of the English patriarchal elite. She not only unearths and recognizes Women’s actions in African uprisings, but also engages with the ideologies and ambitions behind such actions that serve to help us come one step closer to understanding the mental conflict these women must also have fought through.

Chapter six deals with Irish resistance and compliance in a way that highlights the distinctions between the Irish and their African counterparts. Despite the connections that she draws, Shaw reminds a reader that these two groups were distinct, not only in race, religion and culture, but also from the perspective of English law. The subtitle of this book, after all, is Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference. Shaw reminds us that by virtue of their race the Irish were not slaves and they could therefore ‘redeem themselves’ from their inherent perfidy and religious aberrations in the eyes of the English Protestant elite. And this is exactly what Cornelius Bryan does according to the Barbados records that document this former servant and insurgent as a planter and slave-owner in the last decades of his life.

Stylistically, the book is expertly crafted. Shaw obviously recognizes the subtleties of connotation and subtext in the historical documents she scrutinizes and applies that same perception to her own writing. For example, in chapter 5, after a discussion of religious ideology and the metaphor of African slaves “imbodyed with the Irish” (146) she explains how “[v]iewing their antagonists as being of one body, English authorities merged the religious, nascent racial, and cultural threats posed by the Irish, Africans, and Catholics into one unholy entity” (147), her wording playing on the connotations of unnatural union, mixed progeny, and the Catholic holy trinity—all key issues at the forefront of colonial policy.

Structurally, Shaw has crafted a solid frame on which to present her research. A concise introduction determines focus and explains the authors’ methodology and intentions. It also justifies her approach, explaining that an analysis of everyday life requires attention to the “presence of absences” in the historical record and therefore “necessitates the use of informed imagination” (9). In this introduction she also explains choices such as why she used subheadings that replicate the wording of archival documents, namely to serve as a reminder of
the Anglo-centric and patriarchal dominant narrative that neither the protagonists nor the book itself can escape. Her epilogue reflects on the effects of “probing archival spaces and fissures” (190), but also acknowledges the continuing stories of her central ‘characters’ in this unique historical narrative.

Shaw treats her subject and her subjects, i.e., her central characters, with a healthy dose of sensitivity and cynicism. She does not seek to vindicate nor victimize and in this respect she represents persuasive human characters that populated the early Caribbean. The demographic data have been reanimated and the real people are once again visible; and this is a considerable achievement. Shaw’s dramatic recreation of everyday events provides compelling illustration of the historical data she meticulously compiles. And this, in addition to the contemporary woodcuts, engravings, drawings and selected census data entries of the period, serves to animate what could have been a dry and tedious book about colonial ideology and classification of workers according to religious, ethnic, and employment descriptors.

The author’s skill has been not only to acknowledge the marginalized people of the early Caribbean and their agency in the developing ideology of the early Caribbean, but also to endow them with rounded lives that we can relate to. These Caribbean peoples and their everyday lives are essential to understanding how colonial policy and ideology developed and should be on the reading list of any serious scholar of Caribbean history, culture, or law. In addition to its weighty historical credentials, Shaw’s *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean* is also a fascinating, well-composed, downright good read that I would recommend to anyone with even a passing interest in human relationships or real life.