

Idiomatic Toponymic Phrasemes in Bajan: Evidence from Amateur Paremiography

Cristiano Furiassi¹

¹ Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Correspondence: Cristiano Furiassi, Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures, University of Turin, Via Sant'Ottavio 18, 10124 Turin, Italy. E-mail: cristiano.furiassi@unito.it

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Abstract

This study begins with the quantification of the paremiological inventory of Bajan, the English-based creole spoken in Barbados, by examining all the printed collections of proverbs, both amateur and professional, available to date. Consequently, by relying specifically on the amateur paremiographic work on Bajan compiled in 1987 by G. Addinton Forde, namely *De Mortar-pestle: A Collection of Barbadian Proverbs*, this article examines not just the proverbs but also the phrasemes which employ territorial place names found therein. In greater detail, this investigation is intended to show how the idiomatic use of such toponymic phrasemes yields cultural representations characterizing the unique worldview of Barbadians both within and outside the Anglophone Caribbean. Despite the fact that the colonial history of the island and the recollection of the slavery era are still undeniably evident in the toponymic Bajanisms considered, whose authentically local components are almost entirely drawn from the names of former plantations, the intrinsic Barbadianess that stands at their core is foregrounded.

Keywords: Bajan, idioms, paremiography, paremiology, phrasemes, proverbs, toponyms

1. Introduction

It is axiomatic that proverbs are widespread in virtually all languages of the world (see Mieder, 2012, p. 108). However, there are languages in which they seem to be particularly prominent. As shown by recent research, a case in point is that of Caribbean Englishes and Caribbean English-based creoles (see Allsopp, 2000/2006, 2004; Allsopp & Furiassi, 2020), respectively including Barbadian English and Bajan (see Furiassi, 2022, 2023), all characterized by a fairly large number of proverbs.

The present study must be placed within the wider framework of amateur paremiography, that is the compilation of “proverb collections” and “proverb dictionaries” (Kispál, 2015, pp. 229–230) by lay or vernacular lexicographers, a theme which has received academic consideration only recently. Accordingly, among the latest studies on the topic, Lambert (2020), Furiassi (2022), Finegan (2020), Allsopp (2009) and Winer (2006) deserve to be mentioned.

Moreover, this piece of research delves into the highly restricted semantic field of geographical names, i.e. toponyms, as part of idiomatic phraseological units, including proverbs, a subject on which scholarly works appear sporadic. As for the investigation of toponyms and how they combine with other lexical elements to generate prefabricated pieces of language with an idiomatic meaning, the essays by Dueck (2004), Szerszunowicz (2009) and Bredis and Lomakina (2019) are worthy of recognition.

After offering a contextualization of Bajan, the English-based creole of Barbados, and providing an operational definition of idiomatic toponymic phrasemes, this article takes two parallel paths, respectively a quantitative and a qualitative one. While reviewing the Bajan paremiographic sources, both “amateur” and “professional” (Lambert, 2020, pp. 411–412), available to date in print, the focus shifts to the manual retrieval and the attendant counting of entries, so as to measure their numerical contribution. Subsequently, following the extraction of Bajan-only proverbs and other phrase-like units from the examined collections, this article centers on the phrasemes containing territory-specific toponyms precisely drawn from the primary source of this investigation, namely Forde’s (1987) *De Mortar-pestle: A Collection of Barbadian Proverbs*, which, regardless of its amateur essence, represents the most complete paremiographic inventory addressing the salient features of Bajan

proverbs. The typically Bajan toponymic phrasemes found therein are isolated and commented on with a view to explaining their idiomatic use and emphasizing their cultural relevance (see Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2022, pp. 272–275).

2. Hints on Bajan

Several studies on Bajan have been carried out over the years (see Alleyne, 1971, p. 181; Rickford, 1992, p. 195; Fenigsen, 1999, pp. 65–66, 2003, p. 461, 2007, p. 233, 2011, pp. 111–112; Van Herk, 2003, pp. 241–243; Blake, 2004, p. 501; Schneider, 2007, p. 224; Oppizzi, 2010, pp. 135–144; Haynes-Knight, Evans, & Winters-Evans, 2015, pp. 314–315; Stuka, 2023, pp. 94–95) and a summary of both Bajan and Barbadian English has been recently provided by Furiassi (2022, pp. 91–92, 2023, pp. 49–51). For the scope of the present analysis, suffice it to say that *Bajan*, the “clipping or shortening” of the adjective *Barbadian* (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*), identifies the English-based creole still spoken as a native language by the majority of residents in the Caribbean island of Barbados (see also Callender, 2005, p. 19).

From a taxonomic perspective, “Barbadian Creole English” (*Ethnologue*) has been classified as a “mesolectal” (Rickford & Blake, 1990, p. 258; Gibson, 1996, p. 41) or “intermediate” (Winford, 2000, p. 215, 2003, p. 313) creole because of its remarkable lexical similarities with English, its superstratum language. Indeed, this new language creation draws its vocabulary from diatopic varieties of the Modern English of British colonizers and the 17th-century Irish English—and, to a lesser extent, the 18th-century Scottish English—of indentured servants who were deported to Barbados (see Callender, 2005, p. 20). According to Lynch (1972, p. 149), Welsh influence is also found. In addition, inputs from the diastratic register of the lower classes and naval vernacular are not to be dismissed.

However, and most importantly, Bajan is also the offspring of various Niger-Congo languages—especially those presently in use in the contemporary West African states of Ghana and Nigeria—spoken by the enslaved peoples who were forced to work in the many plantations spread over the island. As Bajan and Barbadian English, the variety of English which is the national language of Barbados, work along a continuum, diglossia is evident in most cases: the former is usually encountered in colloquial registers and tends to be limited to orality; the latter, appearing more often in writing, is allocated to formal settings.

3. Terminological Issues: An Operational Definition of Idiomatic Toponymic Phrasemes

Traditionally, paremiography may be subdivided into “proverb collections” and “proverb dictionaries”. On the one hand, “proverb collections [...] interpret proverbs in a broader sense” by also including “proverbial comparisons”, “wellerisms” and “even idioms” (Kispál, 2015, p. 229) (Note 1). On the other hand, “proverb dictionaries [...] interpret proverbs in a narrow sense and so they codify only proverbs that are generally sentential statements” (Kispál, 2015, pp. 229–230).

Since all the publications reviewed (see Section 4) include the term “proverb” in their titles, they are expected to record only proverbs in their respective wordlists. However, it is apparent that they also incorporate other types of phraseological material. This statement is certainly devoid of novelty since, according to Kispál (2015, p. 240), regardless of the theoretical differences mentioned, both proverb collections and proverb dictionaries are known to cover various kinds of phraseological items in addition to proverbs proper.

Even though, from a formal viewpoint, the sentence-like or utterance-like dimension of proverbs is emphasized in authoritative definitions (see Mieder, 1996, p. 597; Klein & Lamiroy, 2016, pp. 17–19), as noted by Norrick (2015, p. 14), “[w]ith culturally determined items like proverbs [...] it is necessary to recognize the fuzziness of the category and the scalar application of features” (Note 2). Due to the mixed nature of the paremiographic sources under scrutiny, the scope of this analysis must be extended to the superordinate category of phrasemes (see Section 6).

In fact, proverbs themselves are just one of the several constituents—possibly the most central ones (see Piirainen, 2008, p. 214)—of the wide-ranging category of phraseology. Therefore, drawing on various studies on the matter, such as Cowie, Mackin and McCaig (1993, p. 10), Mel’čuk (1995, p. 217), Cowie (1998, p. 9), Nuccorini (2006, pp. 37–38, 2016, pp. 60–61), Gries (2008, p. 6) and Pulcini, Furiassi and Rodríguez González (2012, p. 13), this analysis is based on the all-inclusive concept of “phraseme” (Mel’čuk, 1995, p. 179, 2012, p. 32), that is any multi-word expression formed by at least two syntactically linked lexemes which operates as one semantic unit in a clause or sentence. All in all, the definition of phraseme is in turn rather broad and, likewise somewhat characterized by fuzzy borders as it encompasses a continuum of different chains of readymade linguistic material, such as collocations, binomials, phrases, similes, idioms, catch phrases, routine formulas, sayings and proverbs, all subject to rather stable pragmatic constraints.

In particular, within the overarching class of phrasemes, those which rely on toponyms are analyzed from a qualitative perspective in the second part of this article (see Section 6). Before delving deeper into Bajan-specific phrasemes based on local place names, it is necessary to clarify what idiomatic toponymic phrasemes are by providing an operational definition of this concept. The starting point is represented by the term “toponym”, or “place name”, described by McArthur, Lam-McArthur and Fontaine (2018) as “[t]he proper name of a locality, either natural (as of bodies of water, mountains, plains, and valleys) or social (as of cities, counties, provinces, nations, and states)”. Consequently, it is of paramount importance to consider the notion of “toponymic idioms” (Szerszunowicz, 2009, p. 172), namely semantically loaded idiomatic expressions containing geographical denominations which function as carriers of local identity. Thus, by drawing inspiration from the explanations offered above, idiomatic toponymic phrasemes may be defined as multi-word units constituted by place names equipped with culturally relevant connotational meanings alongside their denotational ones.

4. Barbadian Paremiography

As for Bajan paremiography, that is the compilation of proverb dictionaries pertaining to the English-based creole spoken in Barbados, the three amateur products printed to date are the following: Blackman’s (1985) *Bajan Proverbs*, Forde’s (1987) *De Mortar-pestle: A Collection of Barbadian Proverbs* and Ibekwe’s (1998) *Wit & Wisdom of Africa: Proverbs from Africa & the Caribbean*. However, this survey would not be complete without also mentioning the two professional paremiographic products published thus far, namely Richard Allsopp’s (2004) *A Book of Afric Caribbean Proverbs (BACP)* and Bogle’s (2020) *The Transatlantic Culture Trade: Caribbean Creole Proverbs from Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean*. It is worth underscoring once more that, even though the collections analyzed below allegedly include only proverbs, all instances of phraseology encountered therein are considered while calculating the total number of entries.

After a collection period which spanned over almost thirty years, Margot Blackman’s *Bajan Proverbs* came out in 1982 and was soon followed by a second edition in 1985, along with four reprints in 1987, 1989, 1992 and 1995. Blackman’s paremiological glossary consists of eighteen pages and includes a bare list of 382 entries presented in alphabetical order. Unfortunately, the fact that the proverbs she catalogues are unaccompanied by any other piece of information makes it particularly difficult for the reader to fully understand the meaning of at least some of them. As a case in point, *Yuh t’ink I is a Moojun cow?* (Blackman, 1985, p. 18) is presumably opaque to native or proficient speakers of English. Luckily, the *DCEU* records the typically Bajan noun *moojin*—an alternative spelling variant of *moojun* or *moojink*—and defines it as “[a] fool; a stupid person; a worthless idiot”; the entry *moojin* is also found in Cummins (2020, p. 87), who defines it as “[a] fool or silly individual”. Here, the premodifier *moojun* is combined with the noun *cow*, which, interpreted as derogatory, refers to “a woman who is stupid or annoying” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). All considered, uttering this idiom is tantamount to saying *Do you think I’m an idiot?* or *Do you think I’m stupid?*

Almost four decades ago, in 1987, G. Addinton Forde compiled *De Mortar-pestle: A Collection of Barbadian Proverbs*, the most detailed repository of Bajan proverbs ever published. The amateur nature of Forde’s achievement is confirmed by Marshall (1987, p. v), who, in the foreword, writes that “Addinton Forde [...] worked on this collection as a silent toiler without the official encouragement or promise of assistance in publishing”. Notwithstanding the wealth of microstructural information included therein, Forde’s glossary, comprising a total of 295 main entries, is admittedly based—and elaborates—on a selection of headwords from Blackman’s (1985) *Bajan Proverbs* (see Forde, 1987, p. 13). Forde’s is a thematically organized proverb collection divided into three macro-categories: proverbs, similes and sayings (Note 3). Within each topic to which proverbs are assigned, they are arranged in alphabetical order. As opposed to Blackman’s (1985) lack of proper lexicographic details, Forde’s incorporates definitions and, in some cases, explanatory notes, often supplied with drawings and maps aimed at expanding upon the meaning or the etymology of said proverbs.

Wit & Wisdom of Africa: Proverbs from Africa & the Caribbean, a 4,000-entry collection assembled by Patrick Ibekwe during a ten-year period and published in 1998, consists of a mere list of proverbs gathered from different languages belonging to both Africa and the Caribbean. In 2009, select headwords from this publication were incorporated in *The Little Book of African Wisdom* by the same author. Within Ibekwe’s collection, only 51 entries, marked as “BAJAN”, are of interest for the present analysis.

The only major professional attempt at systematizing proverbs of the Anglophone Caribbean—including Barbadian English and Bajan—is *A Book of Afric Caribbean Proverbs (BACP)*, published by Richard Allsopp in 2004. Even though the *BACP* includes as many as 1,313 proverbs, only 182 of them, tagged as “Bdos”, are said to be current in Barbados. More precisely, while 105 of these are also used in other Caribbean English varieties or English-based creoles, as few as 77 pertain to Barbadian English and/or Bajan.

Authored by Desrine Bogle, *The Transatlantic Culture Trade: Caribbean Creole Proverbs from Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean* was published in 2020. Despite being the only other printed work professionally compiled, Bogle's glossary, which contemplates both Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean proverbs, holds almost no interest for Barbadian paremiography. As a matter of fact, only 5 of the 222 proverbs included in this collection are tagged as "Barbados" and thus belong to Bajan, namely, in alphabetical order, *De las' calf kill de cow*, *Last pickney kill mumma*, *Rat mout does sell he head*, *Two head-bulls can't reign in a flock* and *You can run but you can't hide*—the last one found in Antigua as well.

After pondering over the above remarks, it was decided to consider Forde's collection as the source of data for the qualitative portion of this investigation. Although it might not be the most numerous and despite being substantially amateur in nature, it is in fact the one that appears to be the closest to professional standards by offering a rather comprehensive treatment of entries. Additionally, it is particularly relevant as it incorporates the largest number of Bajan toponymic phrasemes, among which proverbs, characterized by idiomatic nuances. Indeed, no idiomatic phraseme inspired by Barbadian place names is found in Ibekwe (1998), Bogle (2020) or the *BACP*. As for Blackman's (1985) glossary, only the following three entries—all discussed below (see Section 6)—show the presence of toponyms: *All yuh labour gone in Maxwell pond* (Blackman, 1985, p. 1), *De Lazaretto dog die at de lighthouse* (Blackman, 1985, p. 2) and *He'll promise you Drax Hall and Kendal* (Blackman, 1985, p. 5).

5. Data Source and Methodology

Although, as the title says, *De Mortar-pestle: A Collection of Barbadian Proverbs* would lead readers to think that it only contains proverbs from Barbados, Forde (1987, p. 10) himself explains that "the term 'Barbadian proverbs' refers more to the usage than the origin". In fact, he further specifies that, at times, the proverbs listed in his collection are spread across other Caribbean territories in addition to Barbados—the same caveat being present in Blackman's (1985) glossary (see Collymore, 1966, p. 158; Brooks, 1985, p. 13).

Therefore, two main issues must be addressed if a reliable quantitative analysis of Forde's work is to be carried out. First, in addition to the 295 items listed as main entries within the collection (see Section 4), lexical variants must be added. Next, of the overall number of entries detected, only those belonging exclusively to Bajan should be considered.

As for the former, lexical variants are to be intended as proverbs which, regardless of their formal dissimilarities due to word choice, in fact convey the same meaning. Identifying synonymic proverbs in Forde's (1987) glossary turned out to be a complex task as they are either not signaled or, when they are, they are not identified by means of unvocal labels. More accurately, 20 proverb entries are preceded by "Also", 6 are introduced by "or" and 1 remains untagged, hence totaling 27 lexical variants, such as, for instance, *Wha' evah in de ole goat in de kiddie* and *De berry don' fall far from de tree*—both indicating that "[c]hildren inherit the traits of their parents" (Forde, 1987, p. 8). By adding these 27 variants to the 295 proverbs originally listed as main entries, the updated overall figure is 322.

As far as the latter aspect is concerned, the following procedures were implemented to select only Bajan-specific proverbs—and, more generally, phrasemes, hence excluding those which are allegedly widespread across other English-based Caribbean creoles. First, as many as 83 entries marked as "(Also) used in [...]" were excluded from the overall count. For instance, *Fisherman never say dat'e fish stink*, meaning that "[p]eople never give bad reports about themselves" (Forde, 1987, p. 12), is also current in Belize and Jamaica. Moreover, 2 entries which, below the definition, mention at least another Caribbean territory where the same proverb is said to be used, were likewise discarded. For example, *A cat can look at de queen*, referring to the fact that "[h]owever humble he is, every person has certain inalienable rights" (Forde, 1987, p. 1), is current in Grenada in its identical form. Therefore, if Forde's findings are deemed sufficiently reliable, by disregarding these 85 instances, the final figure obtained, that is 237, indicates the exact number of proverbs pertaining exclusively to Bajan.

6. Bajan-Specific Toponymic Phrasemes

Amidst this rather extended list of Bajan phrasemes, it was decided to focus and comment on the (only) seven based on Barbadian place names—among which three synonymic alternatives were found: *All me labour gone in Maxwell Pond* (and its variant *All o' me labour gone in Lowther's Pond*), *De Lazaretto dog dead at Ragged Point Lighthouse*, *Dem does work at Idle Hall*, *Dis place hot as Mapp's millyard* (and its variant *Dis place hot as Bayley's millyard*), *Ent she hard! She just like Bulkeley iron man*, *He gine promise you Drax Hall and Kendal*, and *You don't tek down Drax Hall to fix Kendal* (and its variant *You can't tek down Drax Hall to put up Kendal*).

These toponymic phrasemes are highly conspicuous as not only are they directly connected with Barbadian

realia but they also display a meaning which goes beyond the literal (Note 4). Needless to say, the toponymic phrasemes taken into account cannot be encountered anywhere else: they are found in neither the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* nor the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online*, in all likelihood the most trustworthy contemporary dictionaries encompassing the two best-described varieties of English, respectively British and American. Moreover, not even the *BACP* appears to record any of them—a fact which testifies to the relevance of Forde's (1987) accomplishment. Figure 1 shows a map of Barbados where the locations embedded in the toponymic idioms analyzed are indicated (Note 5).

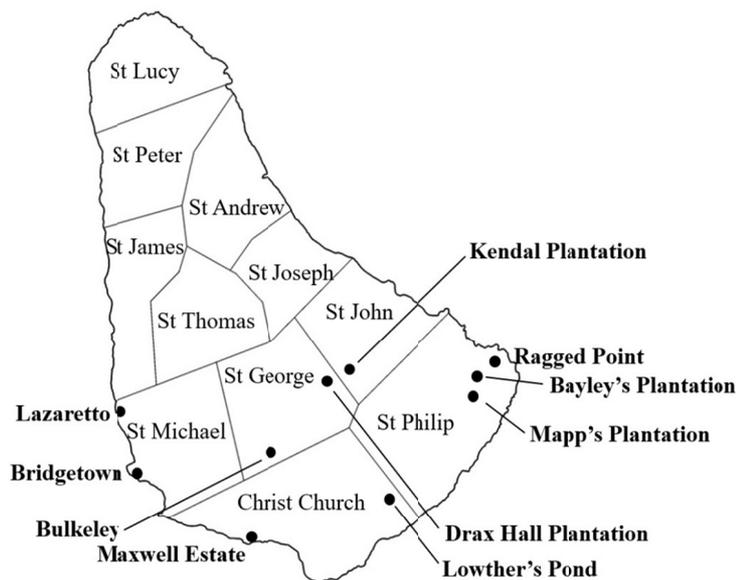


Figure 1. Location of places embedded in Bajan toponymic phrasemes

Evidence that all these toponymic phrasemes belong to Bajan, as opposed to Barbadian English, is granted by their non-standard morphological and orthographic features. Presumably more widely used in oral rather than in written communication—a feature that virtually all proverbs share, they include in their written renderings non-standard inflectional and spelling patterns which do not belong to English. Both the morphological and orthographic singularities of each idiom are highlighted in the following subsections. In this regard, it is helpful to keep in mind Sebba's (2007, p. 83) remark on the matter: “[i]f particular orthographic practices can be iconic of nations and ideologies, then getting rid of those orthographic practices may come to be seen as a part of rejecting colonialism and unwanted or imposed ideologies”.

Although many spelling standards for creoles have been devised worldwide over the past century, if attention is paid to the proposed writing systems for the English-lexified creoles of the Caribbean, such as those regarding Sranan Tongo, spoken in Suriname, and Jamaican Creole, also known as Patwa (Sebba, 2007, p. 19), their use is somewhat limited to official documents or academic publications. As for the former, the first official orthography for Sranan, closer to Dutch spelling standards, was developed in 1960, whereas a second official writing system, more akin to English orthographic conventions, was adopted in 1986 (see Sebba, 2007, pp. 87–91). As for the latter, a standardized creole spelling model for Patwa was conceived in the 1960s by Cassidy and Le Page (1967/1980) in their *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (see Sebba, 2007, 119), while a revised version, presently known as the Cassidy-JLU (Jamaican Language Unit) writing system, was devised in 2002 (see Bogle, 2020, p. 26). Therefore, it goes without saying that the Bajan entries belonging to the collections surveyed—both amateur and professional—do not necessarily comply with the above-mentioned standards, only adopted in Suriname and Jamaica respectively. Regardless, the way in which entries are spelled still manages to mirror the peculiarities of Bajan speech and bring them into prominence. All in all, being contingent on the choices made by each compiler, the adopted spellings may vary, at least to some extent, from collection to collection (see Hellinger, 1986, pp. 58, 62).

On a final note, before proceeding with the qualitative analysis of each toponymic phraseme considered, it is paramount to heed Forde's (1987, p. 10) warning:

"In some instances there is an appearance of originality in the specific use of local names, as in "You can't tek down Drax Hall to put up Kendal," and "De Lazaretto dog dead at Ragged Point Lighthouse," but these could well have been adapted from other territories, with local names substituted, a fact which is difficult to prove or disprove in view of the limited research done in this area".

Accordingly, in the following subsections, the cultural evaluation conveyed by each phraseme—by definition, more semantically pregnant than any single lexical item *per se* (see Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2022, p. 34)—is decoded through the etymological description of its toponymic constituent (see Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2022, pp. 105, 317–320).

6.1 *All Me Labour Gone in Maxwell Pond and All o' me Labour Gone in Lowther's Pond*

As for the morphological features of both sayings, the use of *me* instead of *my* and the absence of the auxiliary *has* before the head verb *gone* stand out as non-standard. From an orthographic perspective, *o'*, followed by an apostrophe, appears instead of *of* in the latter proverb. It is also interesting to notice the British spelling of *labour*, which indeed confirms that the creole of Barbados is based on varieties of English stemming from the British Isles.

The meaning of these two proverbs including Barbadian toponyms, namely *Maxwell Pond* and *Lowther's Pond*, may be condensed into 'someone's efforts or money have been wasted'. A similar version of the former, that is *All his money gone in Maxwell pond*, appears under the entry *Maxwell pond* in Collymore (2005, p. 67), who confirms that this is "a saying denoting that someone's money has been lost in some investment". Likewise, a similar meaning is provided by Richard Allsopp (2003) in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage (DCEU)* under the entry *Maxwell pond*, which reads as follows:

"Max·well pond n phr (Bdos) **PHRASE labour / money gone in Maxwell Pond id phr** (Bdos) [AF–Joc] Effort or money has been lost, wasted in some unfortunate investment. [...] [The phr is historically associated with the former Maxwell (Sugar) Estate in the PARISH of Christ Church in So. Bdos, though no pond or incident has been identified]"

However, in partial contrast to the last statement made by Allsopp in the *DCEU* definition, namely that "no pond or incident has been identified", it is the same Forde (1987, p. 40) who explains that "[a]t Maxwell Pond one day, a frog hunter dropped his half-full bag, forgetting the mouth was open, and started hunting. All his frogs escaped into the pond. He said, "All me labour gone in Maxwell Pond." All his efforts have been wasted". The plausible reason why frogs used to be considered so precious and were hence hunted relies on the fact that they represented a valid natural alternative to eliminate insects long before pesticides. All in all, the inexistence of a pond by that name is confirmed by *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, which, under the entry *Maxwell Pond*, reads as follows: "proper name of the *Maxwell* (Sugar) Estate in Barbados. No actual pond, however, has ever been traced". *Green's Dictionary of Slang* also acknowledges the presence of the phrases *money gone in Maxwell Pond* and *labour gone in Maxwell Pond* in West Indian English speech, specifying that they are "used to describe money or effort that has been wasted or 'thrown away'". It must be added that the variant *All yuh labour gone in Maxwell pond* is also recorded in Blackman (1985, p. 1). The *Legacies of British Slavery (LBS)* database lists Maxwells as a Barbadian plantation possibly established in 1745 and owned by Thomas Maxwell until 1751.

As for the variant *All o' me labour gone in Lowther's Pond*, it seems to have a different etymology as it includes a biblical reference to Ecclesiastes 11 (John 10, 22–42), where Solomon states "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days". Indeed, as Forde (1987, p. 40) reports, "[a] bread-seller took this advice literally, threw a tray of bread into Lowther's Pond, and visited the pond daily to see it return". Although there is no present sign confirming the existence of a pond in the area, it was probably once located in the premises of Lowther's estate. As explained in the *LBS* database, Lowther's, a 214-acre plantation, was first established by Edmond Lewis in 1674. The plantation was later inherited through marriage by Robert Lowther, an English landowner who served as governor of Barbados from 1711 to 1720. In 1756, it passed into the ownership of his first son, James Lowther.

6.2 *De Lazaretto Dog Dead at Ragged Point Lighthouse*

From a morphological point of view, the copular verb *is/was*—and possibly the head verb *found*—is omitted between *dog* and *dead*. The typically creole spelling features of this adage are limited to the use of the article *de* instead of *the*.

As for its semantics, the toponymic proverb *De Lazaretto dog dead at Ragged Point Lighthouse* exploits two

Barbadian place names corresponding to different locations. The Lazaretto, a building adjoining Batts Rock beach in St Michael, almost five kilometers north of Bridgetown, the capital city, stands on the west coast, facing the Caribbean Sea. Ragged Point, in St Philip, is the most easterly tip of Barbados overlooking the Atlantic Ocean (see Furiassi, 2022, p. 100). The distance of about twenty-four kilometers between these two topographic landmarks—truly remarkable, especially considering that it covers the entire width of the island—is useful in explaining the meaning of the proverb, as indicated by Forde (1987, p. 2): “[d]o not expect people to put geographical limits on their movements (Also used in reference to gallivanting men.)”.

The entry *lazaretto Dog Dead in St. Philip*, without the capitalization of the initial <l> in *lazaretto* and where *St. Philip*, the parish where the lighthouse is located, is mentioned instead of *Ragged Point*, is found in Collymore (2005, p. 60) and accompanied by the following comment: “[t]his quaint expression implies that some philandering husband has met his death while visiting his lady love far from home”. Furthermore, the variant *De Lazaretto dog die at de lighthouse*—with no mention of either Ragged Point or St Philip—is recorded in Blackman (1985, p. 2), where, unfortunately, neither the meaning nor any other additional information is provided.

The Lazaretto, formerly the site of a British fort and battery, was converted into an asylum to treat victims of leprosy around 1863. At present, the Lazaretto complex hosts the offices of various public organizations, including the National Archives (see Forde, 1987, p. 2). The lighthouse at Ragged Point was built in 1875. After being long abandoned and temporarily extinguished between 2007 and 2011, it was eventually restored as a navigational aid and has become a tourist attraction since 2018 (see Rowlett, 2023).

6.3 *Dis Place Hot as Mapp’s Millyard* and *Dis Place Hot as Bayley’s Millyard*

As far as the morphology of this simile is concerned, the absence of the copula *is* between *place* and *hot* is worth considering. The creole nature of the spelling conventions applied to both entries is apparent in the use of *Dis* instead of *this*. Semantically, both *Dis place hot as Mapp’s millyard* and its variant, *Dis place hot as Bayley’s millyard*, appear to denote ‘a place that is extremely hot’ (see Furiassi, 2022, p. 99).

According to Forde (1987, pp. 37–38), the idiomatic reference to hotness may be connected to the uprising led by an African-born slave named Bussa, which took place in St Philip between April 14th and April 16th, 1816 (see Beckles, 2006, pp. 108–116) (Note 6). Indeed, during Bussa’s revolt, the fire set by the insurgents to Bayley’s plantation and its estate immediately extended to the adjoining Mapp’s plantation. The simile *as hot as Mapp’s mill-yard* is also recorded under the entry *Mapp’s mill-yard* in Collymore’s (2005) *Barbadian Dialect*. Even though he has “not been able to discover its origin”, Collymore (2005, p. 66) admits that “the simile [...] still lingers on among the older generation”.

As per the *LBS* database, Mapps plantation—spelled without the apostrophe indicating possession—was owned by the Mapp family from at least 1720. As of more recent times, Forde (1987, p. 38) explains that Graham Wilkes rented the estate in 1957 and three years later, in 1960, founded on the premises the now defunct Mapp’s College, a private secondary school. Besides, Bayley’s plantation was established between 1719 and 1738; by 1765 it was in the possession of Joseph Bayley. As for the present, Guyana-born singer Eddy Grant acquired Bayley’s plantation, where he currently resides, in 1981. He restored the main plantation house and converted the stables into a recording studio (see Forde, 1987, p. 38).

6.4 *Dem Does Work at Idle Hall*

The creole traits of the saying *Dem does work at Idle Hall*, whose meaning is “[t]hey are unemployed” (Forde, 1987, p. 41), are apparent. Morphologically, the auxiliary *does*, which substitutes *do* and would be normally used in (Standard) English to remark emphasis, is applied here to stress habituality; *Dem*, the orthographic rendering of *Them*, indicates the subject even though it appears in the objective case. To be able to explore the semantic implication of *Dem does work at Idle Hall*, readers must resort to the *DCEU*: *work at Idle Hall*, found within the entry *Idle Hall (Estate)*, means “[t]o be unemployed (and not too concerned about finding a job)”. A similar saying, *To work at Walker’s and get paid at Idlehall*, is listed in Blackman (1985, p. 11). Even in this case, the *DCEU* proves useful in discerning its hidden sense: the verb phrase *work(ing) at Walkers (& Co)*, present under the entry *Walkers & Co*, means “[b]e(ing) unemployed”. According to the data provided in the *DCEU*, both entries are marked as “Bdos” and should hence be considered prototypically Bajan. However, it is worth pointing out that both *Walkers* and *Idle Hall* are made-up names of imaginary places which, quite straightforwardly, hint at a state of (permanent) inertia. In fact, a partially different explanation is provided by Collymore (2005, p. 114) under the entry *Walker’s*, which reads as follows: “to be employed at *Walker’s* (the name of a plantation) is a euphemism signifying that the person referred to is walking around seeking employment”. Accordingly, Lynch (1972, p. 152) mentions *flaneur* to describe someone “who works at Walkers and lives at Easy Hall”.

6.5 *Ent She Hard! She Just Like Bulkeley Iron Man*

Considering the morphological features of this simile, the deletion of the copulative verb *is* between *She* and *just* is an apparent creole trait. As regards spelling, *Ent* is used to render *Isn't*. Quite curiously, the toponymic simile considered is included in a made-up example intended to mimic a conversation taking place in Bajan. All in all, *To be hard like Bulkeley iron man* is apparently intended to address an individual who is “hard (skinny) as iron” (Forde, 1987, p. 38). Although no Barbadian or Caribbean connotation of *hard* as ‘thin’ is present in the *DCEU*, the meaning provided by Forde is presumably based on the resemblance between said person and the material used to build the largest steam-operated mill of any sugar factory in Barbados, installed at Bulkeley, in the parish of St George, in the 1920s (see Forde, 1987, p. 38). The factory is named after William Bulkeley, who, as claimed by the *LBS* database, was “listed as a landowner in 1638” and whose “plantation remained in the hands of the Bulkeley family until 1724”. At present, the Bulkeley Sugar Factory still functions as one of the oldest continuously operating sugar factories on the island (see Forde, 1987, p. 39).

6.6 *He Gine Promise You Drax Hall and Kendal*

As for the morphology of this proverb, the omission of the copula *is* between *He* and *gine* is evident. As far as its spelling is concerned, *gine* is used instead of *going to*. *To promise Drax Hall and Kendal*, meaning ‘to make hollow promises’, corresponds to *promise (someone) the stars/moon/earth/world*, that is “to promise (someone) that one will do or give something great or wonderful even though it is not possible” (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*). The reason for the inclusion of these two place names in this proverb is logically explained by the fact that “[t]hose two plantations were at one time the two largest in Barbados” (Forde, 1987, p. 42). It is worth mentioning that a similar entry, *He'll promise you Drax Hall and Kendal*, is found in Blackman (1985, p. 5), who only adds that the place names mentioned in the saying are “two estates in Barbados”.

As maintained by the *LBS* database, Drax Hall, located in St George, was built by William and James Drax in the 1650s. Colonel James Drax, who also owned a plantation by the same name in St Ann, Jamaica, is known to have introduced sugar cane cultivation to Barbados as early as 1642, not long before the outset of the “Sugar Revolution” (O’Callaghan, 2000, p. 93; Beckles, 2006, p. 27), which took place in 1644 and converted the economy of the island from tobacco to sugar production. Nowadays, the Drax family still retains the possession of the estate, which remains a sugar plantation. Drax Hall is one of the only two intact Jacobean houses remaining in Barbados—the other one being St Nicholas Abbey in St Peter (see Forde, 1987, p. 22; Lynch, 1972, p. 107). On the contrary, little is known about Kendal or Kendall, as spelled by Pinckard (1806, p. 330), except that, in line with the information provided by the *LBS* database, it was established by Joshua Steele in 1757 and was then known as Kendals—with the addition of the final <s> in the name.

6.7 *You Don't Tek Down Drax Hall to Fix Kendal and You Can't Tek Down Drax Hall to Put up Kendal*

The only non-standard features appearing in both these proverbs relate to spelling: *tek* appears instead of *take* and *can*, followed by an apostrophe, is used instead of *can't*. The formal differences between *You don't tek down Drax Hall to fix Kendal* and *You can't tek down Drax Hall to put up Kendal* lie in the use of the modal *can't* and the presence of *put up*, instead of *fix*, in the latter proverb. Their semantic interpretation is related to the concept of Drax Hall and Kendal being the two wealthiest estates in Barbados (see Section 6.6). Indeed, as detailed by Forde (1987, p. 22), “Drax Hall plantation, with 881 acres, was and still is the largest single plantation in Barbados; Kendal, in St. John, is the second largest, with 718 acres” (see also Pinckard, 1806, p. 363). Forde (1987, p. 22) adds that the meaning of both proverbs can be explained as follows: “[i]t does not make sense destroying something of value in order to make right something of equal or less value”.

7. Conclusion

In general, this piece of research has shown how “dictionaries [...] reflect [...] the relation between language and culture” (Gouws, 2020, p. 3). Transitively, the present investigation—however limited—has proven that the cultural aspects of Barbadian society are mirrored in its paremiographic heritage. Indeed, the idiomatic toponymic phrasemes analyzed all “contain figurative elements with cultural implications” (Cotta Ramusino & Mollica, 2020, p. 4) and act as carriers of “culture-boundness” (Sabban, 2007, p. 590, 2008, p. 232).

Toponymic phrasemes were selected by relying on the metalexigraphic analysis of Forde’s (1987) glossary, a personal, passionate effort which, by narrating Bajan culture, gives voice to the Barbadian speech community and bears relevance to the English-based creole it speaks. Forde managed to bring to the forefront aspects of local heritage that would have likely been lost otherwise. His honest cataloguing of territorial paremiology successfully validates the linguistic tradition of Barbadians, hence preserving it for both present and succeeding generations. This tribute to Barbadianness certainly merits to be recognized as a landmark in the paremiographic

landscape of the island.

From a quantitative perspective, the paremiological inventory of Bajan emerges as bountiful not only thanks to the inclusion of brand-new proverbs and proverb-like phrases arising from long-established English lexical material, but also thorough the “resemanticization” (Paganoni, 2007, p. 187) of English-derived toponyms which, despite pertaining to the harsh colonial history of Barbados, have been recontextualized and semantically redetermined. Moreover, from a qualitative viewpoint, this article has shown how the uniqueness of Barbadian place names gives birth to equally distinctive Bajan idiomatic phrasemes that can only be unearthed from the communicative practices of islanders.

Unsurprisingly, most of the toponyms detected, namely *Bayley*, *Bulkeley*, *Drax*, *Kendal*, *Lowther*, *Mapp* and *Maxwell*, denote former sugar-cane plantations established between the 17th and the 18th century and the attendant estates around which slaves were forced to work. In virtually all cases, said toponyms clearly derive from their respective anthroponyms—equally endowed with connotational nuances (see Szerszunowicz, 2012, p. 297; Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2022, p. 318)—identifying the last names of early British owners (Note 7). The messages carried by the toponymic Bajanisms described draw attention to the archetypal weltanschauung of Barbadians, which breaks away from the English that had been superimposed over nearly 400 years of British dominion. Although the collective recollection of the slavery era might be irremovable, the above findings bear witness to the fact that Bajans have long ceased to live (and speak) under the enduring shadow of their colonial past.

Before concluding, two desiderata seem in order. To begin with, an aspect that should be considered for further research is the verification of whether the idiomatic toponymic phrasemes discussed are actually (still) used by contemporary speakers of Bajan or, being the sole possession of the elderly, they are inexorably doomed to extinction. Then, it would be equally worthwhile to retrieve all the lexical and phraseological coinages—not just the proverbs—inspired by Barbadian toponyms with the goal of systematizing them. For the sake of exhaustiveness, this survey should be performed by investigating the toponymic entries encountered in all the Bajan (and Barbadian English) lexicographic and paremiographic products available, regardless of whether their approach is scholarly or essentially amateur.

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Notes

Note 1. According to the *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, a *Wellerism*—an eponym first used in 1838 and stemming from Samuel Weller, a character in the *Pickwick Papers* by the English novelist Charles Dickens—is “an expression of comparison comprising a usually well-known quotation followed by a facetious sequel”.

Note 2. The definition of proverbs *sensu stricto* provided by Mieder (1996, p. 597) reads as follows: “[...] short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation”. Alternatively, Norrick (2015, p. 14) defines proverbs as “recurrent, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognizable units used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event. This definition differentiates them from non-sentential items like proverbial phrases, idioms, binomials etc.”.

Note 3. In Kispál’s (2015, p. 240) words, “[c]ollections containing mainly proverbs, except of few, are often mere lists without any information on their meaning and usage. Proverbs are ordered alphabetically mostly by keywords. In thematically organized proverb collections, the starting points are alphabetically ordered topics to which proverbs are assigned”.

Note 4. A preliminary study on Bajan toponyms extracted from a wide range of lexicographic—though not strictly paremiographic—sources has been recently carried out by Furiassi (2022).

Note 5. Image sourced from Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barbados_parishes_blank.png. Adapted and shared in compliance with Creative Commons license CC BY 4.0 DEED. Retrieved from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed>

Note 6. In fact, “Joseph Pitt Washington, a free coloured man, [...] was alleged to be the brain behind the rebellion” (Lynch, 1972, p. 21).

Note 7. Lynch (1972, p. 163) points out that “many [...] Barbadian place-names were obviously donated by Englishmen of an earlier day whose presence in England [...] was an embarrassment to their families whose dearest wish it was that they should sojourn in far-off climes—the farther off the better”.

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