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BOOK REVIEW:

LONDON, JEFFREY MATTHEW. 2009.
HOW THE USE OF MARIJUANA WAS CRIMINALIZED AND MEDICALIZED.
LEWINSTON, NY: EDWIN MELLEN PRESS

The debate on the use of marijuana between those who focus their activity on contributing to the philosophy of liberalization and the representatives of "hard line" fighting for prohibition is still popular not only in the United States, but also across European countries. Both sides used to employ arguments that are more or less rational, but catchy; trying to win a broader support for their particular goals. In many countries, we can observe social movements, usually gathering young activists who popularize the idea of open access to marijuana for personal use. In Poland, one of the newly born liberal parties – Palikot's Movement[1] – even introduced the proposal of the liberalization of the use of marijuana, one of their official points in their political program.[2] It has opened the public discussion and divided society into declared supporters and opponents who used to perceive the role of government and internal politics in a different way. The dilemma is, to some extent, similar to the one described by Erich Fromm in his book *Escape from freedom* (1941) (also known as *Fear from freedom*). Adjusting Fromm's dilemma, there is the question: what should be the proportion between security dimension understood as prohibition of using marijuana and freedom of choice with all its consequences? There is a question of citizens' freedom and its limitations rooted in democratic standards.

Looking at the latest history of Western countries, we can assume that using marijuana has become an inseparable part of culture. This is the reason why so much academic attention is paid to this social phenomenon. In the late 60's and 70's marijuana was the symbol of alternative culture gathering young Americans fighting for peace against the war in Vietnam and other significant places. Smoking marijuana became a way to symbolize the peaceful philosophy linked with hippies who denied the official establishment and "from the bottom" were trying to build an alternative society based on *making love not war*. The song *Imagine* by John Lennon had become, in the 70's, one of the most popular songs directing the way of thinking represented by youth not only in the United States, but also in Iron Curtain countries. Across decades, the public disputes and opinions have changed many times, but the way of perceiving marijuana in terms of its criminalization and medicalization is still up-to-date. Jeffrey Matthew London was trying to describe the tendencies mentioned above by showing the changes in the main players' approaches to using marijuana through the decades. It is difficult not to agree with the words of Robert Regoli that "what makes this book exceptional is that [the author] provides a thorough qualitative historical analysis of marijuana's past and present social constructs" (Foreword:i). London successfully depicted "the way a plant is transformed into a crime, and how a crime is transformed into a medicine" (Foreword:i). According to his thesis, the criminalization process of using marijuana started in the early 1900's when the first government officials' efforts were focused "to define marijuana use as a criminal problem" leading to its eradication from public disputes (p. 1). London points out that in recent times we experience the opposite process of marijuana medicalization initiated by non-profit grassroots organizations. These attempts to redefine marijuana are focused on changing the public perception and, as a result, decriminalize using it within a specific frame. The two mentioned powers also propose a different way of describing marijuana users naming them *criminals* or *patients*. These two approaches also lead the way in the treatment of smokers by punishing them or curing them.

Surely, the discussed tendencies are divided into interest groups competing to win social support for their purposes by imposing their interpretations and the language used to discuss this dilemma. Both sides, in the process of mutual negotiations within countless discussions, have changed the model of debates and language. They have been paying more and more attention to make their arguments sound scientific and, as a result, rational for a broader public opinion. More and more, the science representatives were engaged to provide some proof used by lobbying groups to convince the public opinion and win with the opponents' argumentation. The mentioned processes, tendencies and changing social backgrounds can be found in this book.

Social scientists are interested in many aspects (political, cultural, social, legal, etc.) connected with smoking marijuana. Using marijuana also stays in the direct field of interest of sociology, especially the sociology of deviance and labeling theories that are based on medicalization theories as pointed out by London. Probably the most popular sociological text touching this problem is *Becoming a marihuana user* by Howard Becker (1953). Becker, adopting an interpre-

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1 Original name: Ruch Palikota.
2 In the project of the change of the bill of drug addiction prevention we can read that those who possess small doses of marijuana will not be investigated by the police and prosecuted (see http://www.ruchpalikota.org.pl/sites/default/files/projekt_ustawy_-_o_przeciwdzialaniu_narkomanii.pdf, retrieved March 22, 2012).

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tative perspective, investigates some social contexts and mutual interactions lying under the process of becoming a marijuana smoker and being labeled by the social environment as some kind of outsider. Jeffrey London also describes the problem of using marijuana in terms of deviance, but adopting a historical perspective. It enables him to follow changes taking place throughout decades. "The book examines how the label of deviant applies to marijuana users over the last 100 years" (p. 2). The reader is introduced to looking at this problem as a process that is based on the struggle between different, sometimes opposite, forces (medicalization and criminalization) that used to play important roles in creating a legal establishment. The *status quo* is changing in relation to the influence of supporters.

The reviewed book consists of six chapters encompassing presentation of theories used for analyses and some different aspects and processes based upon the medicalization and criminalization of marijuana usage. The division of chapters used in this work seems to be clear and logical, making the book easy to read. The reader has the possibility to look at the discussed problems in chronological order.

In the first chapter, *Introduction*, the author introduces the used methods of data collection and interpretation. Investigating the circumstances influencing the legal limitations of using marijuana, London bases his research on federal and state legislative acts that caused criminalization and decriminalization of marijuana to be identified both with crime and medical use. More-

over, there are also analyses of Court cases. London also presents and characterizes many documents influencing public debate and legal establishment in this area (Supreme Court cases, legislative records and transcripts, major newspaper articles, congressional debates, speeches, etc.). The material seems to be rich enough to make some conclusions helpful in understanding these two opposite processes influencing the discussed issues. Doing research and interpreting data, London decided to use three analytic perspectives: Peter Conrad and Joseph Schneider's theory to study the medicalization of deviance, Michael Foucault's five principles of the "Science of Discipline" and Elliott Currie's macro-level tenets to explain the institutionalization of deviant designations. The mentioned concepts "are connected to form a framework for studying deviance designation change" on a micro-, mid- and macro-level (p. 5).

The next chapter – *The three stages of Deviant Designation* – encompasses Conrad and Schneider's, Foucault's and Currie's approaches to show the process of deviance labeling from three levels (a micro-, mid- and macro-perspective). As a result, the built *three-stage theory* is used to examine the entire processes of deviant designation. In my opinion, the application of these theoretical perspectives rooted in an interpretative standpoint is useful for describing the elements of medicalization and criminalization. It is worth saying that the author not only operates with the mentioned theories, skillfully trying to combine them into one analytical frame, but also proposes his own interpretations in presenting the processes of deviance designation.

In chapter three, *Kendall and Wickham's Method*, we can find the way of interpreting historical materials adopted by Jeffrey London. "Kendall and Wickham's method instructs to view history as an action and not simply an existing record of unquestionable interpretations of the past...[This method] guides researchers not in what we look for but how to look" (p. 27). According to London, this method of qualitative analysis is especially applicable when there is a need to manage a huge amount of documentation, both historical and contemporary. The author argues that Kendall and Wickham's method, linked with Foucault's philosophy of describing reality, enables or even emphasizes the researcher's freedom in terms of skeptical interpretation of gathered documents (*Problematise history, spot contingencies, be skeptical of all political arguments* and *Suspending second-order judgments*). All the methodological hints characterized by London and enriched by examples direct a researcher both toward criticism and sensitivity with new evidences appearing and the interaction between them. In the next parts of the book the author applies them to analyze the presented problems.

In chapter four, *Archeology of Marijuana Criminalization*, the author uses Conrad and Schneider's theory to investigate the discursive mechanisms lying under the process of marijuana criminalization. London focused on "the way by which power and knowledge work together in an alliance through language and material actions to accomplish specific goals" that result in building the system of citizen control and even more (p. 51). The used methodologi-

cal and theoretical perspective allows to follow changes across decades. It enables us to investigate connections including the mutual interactions and influences of the main players that lobbied for marijuana criminalization. Based on eight major legislative events, there are also other mechanisms of influence presented that cause the transformation of social perception relating to using marijuana. As London wrote, "this chapter focuses on the rapid shift in systems of thought about marijuana" (p. 53).

Chapter five – *A Genealogy of Marijuana Medicalization* – encompasses the opposite mechanisms that balance and neutralize the influence of the previously described tendencies by changing the social perception of marijuana and, as a result, the legal environment. Here, there are discussed state laws introduced in nine states in the US (Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington). The author adopts Foucaultian genealogy as an analytical tool to present and interpret collected data. In this part he also distinguishes the main players and lobbyists who introduce the medical marijuana social movement to public discourse. As a result, those actions changed the public thinking about marijuana being transformed from crime to medicine. There is also visible the author's attempt to give information useful for predicting the direction of discourse in the future. London argues that "studying these tactics is important because these tactics involve changing the way that people talk, think, and act toward marijuana today, as well as how people may talk, think, or act toward one another tomorrow" (p. 93-94).

The last chapter contains *Conclusions* based on different kinds of data analyzed especially in chapter four and five. The main conclusion is that the public perception of marijuana and the processes of deviance designation have been changing dramatically over the period of one century. Over the years, there appeared a lot of conditions that played more or less important roles in shaping the public perception and consciousness relating to marijuana. As a result, the limits of prohibition and the reasons lying under it also have changed.

In my opinion, the main advantage of reading this book is the knowledge that could be applicable in understanding the public debates, voices of scientific authorities and "moral entrepreneurs" influencing legal limitations concerning using marijuana in other countries. This book puts more light on the interest group activities oriented on reaching the specific goals through discourses applied to convince the public opinion. The reality described by Jeffry London is flowing under the direction of lobbying main players.

Even if we take into account that London's analyses and interpretations are limited to America's reality that bases on different past and contemporary cultural conditions, philosophy of democracy and public opinion, other than the European understanding of free will, we can draw some interesting conclusions. These conclusions refer to the mechanisms playing important roles in shaping people's perception of disputable issues present in public life.

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