

**Bailey Stone: Rethinking  
Revolutionary Change in Europe. A  
Neostructuralist Approach, Lanham  
et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020,  
291 pp.**

Reviewed by  
Matthias Middell, Leipzig

Even if one or the other participant or observer wants to have known better afterwards: revolutions usually break out unexpectedly and their course and outcome also follow unpredictable rules. Sometimes the old conditions are overcome, sometimes the upheaval comes to a standstill after a short time and usually frustration about what has been achieved is mixed into the initially euphoric balance sheet at some point. In contrast to social theories that concentrate on structural connections, revolutions are the event par excellence, even if numerous explanations of revolutions (want to) establish a connection between structural preconditions and the course of the event. Against this background, there is equally a need for detailed reconstruction of the individual revolution, which can only be understood from its own dynamics, and a need for theory in order to be able to predict, bring about or prevent future revolutions.

A division of labour has emerged for both tasks, assigning the first task more to historical research and placing the second task in the hands of sociologists or political scientists. The present volume is deeply marked by this division of labour, for it

draws on a quite considerable number of historical works on individual revolutions, but is entirely devoted to the efforts of social scientists to generalise the phenomenon of revolution and to classify it in a set of social theories, while the detailed analysis of specific revolutions, on the other hand, serves more as a source of material. Historians therefore do not necessarily find themselves classifying their works under prestructuralist, structuralist and postmodernist. They are probably also left somewhat dissatisfied when Bailey Stone praises Michael Kimmel's book as one of the best introductions to sociological writings on revolution and emphasises its reduction of the whole event to three components: Ultimately, every revolution can be understood by looking at the international context, the class struggle, and the state. This is probably not falsifiable under certain conditions, but what is gained from it other than a concise distinction between Marxist/Leninist "capitalism-centred structuralism" and Weberian/Hintzian "state-centred structuralism"? Unfortunately, however, does not take this distinction, which may provide some guidance for freshmen, much further in the eyes of our author, for he is well aware that many interpreters of revolutions relate state and capitalism to each other in some way.

In addition to the structuralist theories thus classified, Bailey Stone presents a postmodern understanding of history that no longer believes in insight into any kind of objective truth and sees the world (including revolution) as a product of perceptions, representations, and imaginations that eventually converge in a script that may turn into an event. The revolution as

the enforcement of such a script of how the world should be seen gives greater weight to the political will over the structural preconditions. The debate about the balance between these two points of view can be traced back well to the 1980s, when an overly deterministic understanding of the causes of revolution was replaced by a stronger emphasis on political cultural history, but one can also trace this debate even further back, because in the *history from below* of the 1950s and 1960s, it was just as important to listen to the elites and especially the marginalised actors and to reconstruct their agency.

Obviously, certain themes recur regularly and for a convincing history of theory it would have been an appealing question when and why at a certain point in time perspectives become more important and others lose their appeal. All this has also been dealt with in various books on revolutionary historiography, but does not seem to be the concern of the author of this introduction, as he is more concerned with a kind of static systematics and not with the reasons for certain developments and preferences.

Five chapters are now devoted to this systematics on the basis of certain problems that can be found in various revolutions and historiographies of revolution: first, the question of whether revolutions have something to do with modernisation or whether they take place largely decoupled from this agenda; then, the pre-revolutionary manifestation of certain social constellations (the existence and figuration of the bourgeoisie under the Old Regimes is discussed as an example), which in a certain reading (among contemporaries and later historians) were actually only helped to

break through by the revolution. Chapter 3 discusses the extent to which the execution of monarchs were arbitrary acts of state violence or procedurally fitted into the newly established legal order, which the following chapter follows insofar as it asks about reasons and legitimations for outbreaks of revolutionary violence (*terreur*). Finally, the last chapter deals with the transition from the exceptional revolutionary situation to the stability-oriented legitimisation of a post-revolutionary order.

All five chapters are characterised by the fact that they draw on a broad literature, in which, however, it is not the empirical findings but the central theses distilled by the author that are of particular interest. Whoever has written an interesting book in the last three or four decades may therefore not appear in the bibliography if he or she does not fit into the scheme that B. Stone has given to the interpretation of the revolution.

For which reading circle should one recommend this volume? There is a paradoxical answer here. Social scientists should be strongly discouraged from making this volume the basis of their thinking about revolutions, for they will get nothing but confirmation of the inherently dangerous notion that one could squeeze the variety of revolutionary event cards into the small square of a few sociological theories. In this procedure one is always reminded of the poor guests of Procrustes, who all suffered from being either too small or too large for the bed that he made the measure of all things. Either stretched or mutilated, none escaped this operation alive. This is how it may feel to the historians quoted in this volume, who merely have to serve as

proof that the world can be divided into one to three strands of theory. Unfortunately, the author does not question this scheme, because it seems so obvious in the context of his own subject that he does not even ask if these strands of theory are more than mere fictions.

On the other hand, the volume seems to me an extremely useful reading for historians who are engaged in the reconstruction of individual revolutions or the comparison of several revolutionary outbreaks, because they learn here what expectations are placed on the theorising ability of their reconstruction work. The author knows how to place the interest in revolutions, which has been almost unbroken for over 200 years, even if in the meantime the end of all revolutions has been predicted again and again, in the context of today's debates on social theory. Knowing these parameters undoubtedly helps to fit the retelling of what happened during past revolutions and what might have caused them into these theoretical frameworks in such a way that a meaningful conversation between historians and social scientists can emerge. For this, the volume is a more than worthwhile read and a handout for all those who are not per se familiar with sociologists' claims on historians' reconstructive work.

**Claudia Varella / Manuel Barcia:**  
**Wage-Earning Slaves. Coartación in**  
**Nineteenth-Century Cuba,**  
**Gainesville: University of Florida**  
**Press, 2020, 236 pp.**

Reviewed by  
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Das ist eindeutig ein Forschungsbuch, ein exzellentes. Es ist fern von heutigen Diskurs- und Historiografie-Analysen oder *memory*-Debatten und versucht ein historisches Problem auf der Basis von Archivalien zu lösen. Es ist kein Publikumsbuch und dürfte auch für fortgeschrittenere Studenten schwierig zu verstehen sein. Würde es allerdings breiter rezipiert (was zu wünschen ist), könnte es endgültig mit der Annahme einer „eher milden“ Sklaverei in iberischen Kolonien und speziell im Kuba unter spanischer Kontrolle (1510–1898) brechen. Eines der Ziele des Buches ist es, zu zeigen, wie kompliziert *agency* von Sklaven innerhalb der gegebenen Legalität eines spezifischen Sklaverei-Regimes war. Die Analyse zeigt eine „andere“ Sklaverei als etwa in den USA oder in Brasilien (heute oft unter „second slaveries“ zusammengefasst<sup>1</sup>), nämlich eine extrem marktwirtschaftliche, dynamische, kapitalistische Sklaverei unter den Bedingungen einer extremen asymmetrischen Kolonial-Dependenz, die auch durch eine ausgeformte Legalität kaum zu steuern war. Marktwirtschaftliche Geldbeziehungen zwischen Sklaven und Herren (Sklavinnen und Herrinnen eingeschlossen) waren