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BOOK REVIEWS

Scripting Revolution. A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions. Ed. by Keith M. Baker and Dan Edelstein. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2015. ix, 438 pp. \$90.00. (Paper: \$29.95).

In his afterword to this volume of essays, David A. Bell calls *Scripting Revolution* “one of the first serious attempts (perhaps *the* first) at a comparative history of revolutions from a cultural and hermeneutic point of view, as opposed to a social scientific one” (p. 353).¹ Co-editors Keith M. Baker and Dan Edelstein, both specialists on the French Revolution, and their seventeen contributors survey major upheavals, ranging from the English Revolution in the seventeenth century to the Arab Spring at the dawn of the twenty-first, seeking to analyze the “scripts” that framed or guided the thoughts and actions of their participants. The comparative study of revolutions has a long history, although Baker and Edelstein argue that the field has largely gone dormant in the past quarter-century, coinciding with the cultural turn in historical studies that has discouraged projects like Barrington Moore’s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), Theda Skocpol’s, *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), and Jack A. Goldstone’s, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (1991). This volume, the outgrowth of a conference held at Stanford University in 2011, aims to revive the comparative approach while avoiding what Baker and Edelstein see as the structuralist and teleological tendencies of studies rooted in sociology.

Baker, a senior scholar of the French Revolution, was one of the leaders of the linguistic turn that marked historical studies in the 1980s. He first introduced the notion of revolutionary “scripts” in a 1981 article, “A Script for a French Revolution: The Political Consciousness of the Abbé Mably”.² The definition of revolutionary script offered in the introduction to *Scripting Revolution* is essentially the same as the one Baker proposed in that essay: “a script [...] constitutes a frame within which a situation is defined and a narrative projected”. The importance of the concept is that “in politics, as in the theater or on the screen, scripts generate events” (p. 3). They guide revolutionary actors and provide them with a sense of the larger narrative in which they are playing a part. *Scripting Revolution* offers Baker a chance to revisit another of his most influential essays from the 1980s, the piece that provided the title for his 1990 volume *Inventing the French Revolution*. In that essay, he argued that 1789 marked a transformation from an earlier notion of revolution as any kind of sudden political or social upheaval to a new conception of revolution as a singular process resulting from intentional human action. As he puts it in his own contribution to *Scripting Revolution*, until 1789 “revolution was a fact rather than an act” (p. 95). Since the storming of the Bastille, however, revolutions have been events of a special nature and have had a clear model to follow.

Although Baker’s analysis of the French Revolution provides the “script” for the volume as a whole, other contributions challenge his Bastille-centric model, and Baker’s own

1. A more narrowly focused effort at comparison, to which two of the participants in *Scripting Revolution* also contributed, was Jeremy D. Popkin (ed.), *Media and Revolution* (Lexington, KY, 1995).

2. A revised version of Baker’s article appeared in his collection of essays *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 86–106.

approach has undergone some important modifications since the 1980s. Contributions by Tim Harris and David Como show that the abrupt change in the understanding of the word “revolution” in 1789 posited in Baker’s model was, in fact, anticipated in seventeenth-century England, where usages of the term similar to those that would become common a century later can already be found. David Armitage points to the debt that the French revolutionaries’ conception of what they were doing owed to their reading of Roman historians on civil war, which he suggests “was the original genus of which revolution was only a late evolving species” (p. 67). Jack Rakove agrees with Baker that the American Revolution did not have the same activist conception of revolution as the French, but points out that it produced its own original script of revolution as a prelude to constitution-making. One might add that the American Revolution also invented a widely-imitated script for wars of independence. Baker supports his own argument with new methods, particularly the results of database searches for words associated with “revolution” before and after 1789, and finds an evolution in the direction of the 1789 concept in several Enlightenment texts, particularly the Abbé Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*, one of the most widely read works of the 1770s and 1780s.

Baker’s Stanford colleague Edelstein, with whom Baker has collaborated on a number of projects, offers a perspective of his own on the French Revolution. In contrast to Baker, he argues that “the concepts that were assembled to produce its new definition had long been in circulation, in virtually the exact same combination” (p. 120), and he cites the English Levellers of the seventeenth century as an example. He also sees an evolution in the course of the French Revolution itself, as “revolution [...] became the authority that justified revolution”, opening the door to the notion of a perpetual revolutionary process rather than one meant to abolish itself (p. 119). Guillaume Mazeau provides an example of this process in his analysis of the revolutionaries’ reaction to the assassination of the radical journalist Marat, while Malick Ghachem questions whether the “script” for the Haitian Revolution derived from the American and French movements, both initiated in the context of slaveholding societies.

No one has ever doubted that the French Revolution strongly influenced subsequent movements, in Europe and around the world. Many of the contributions devoted to nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutions, however, show that many other revolutionary scripts were in circulation, even in France itself, where the movements of 1830, 1848, and 1871 were accompanied by anxiety that “mimicry” of 1789 would discredit its successors, as Dominica Chang argues. Gareth Stedman Jones claims that Karl Marx’s journalism in 1848, as opposed to the abstract formulations of the famous *Communist Manifesto*, reflected a more moderate vision of revolutionary possibilities rather than a desire to follow a Jacobin model. Discussions of the Russian Revolution, by Claudia Verhoeven and Ian D. Thatcher, and of China, by Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Yidi Wu and Alexander Cook, identify many alternative models of revolution that had little to do with the French example, and Lillian Guerra’s discussion of revolutionary filmmaking in Castro’s Cuba makes only perfunctory mention of the volume’s general theme.

The one contribution that rivals Baker’s own chapter in terms of suggesting a general framework for the study of revolutions is Julian Bourg’s discussion of the French movement of May 1968, which suggests that the activism of that year, in Paris and around the world, marked the point when “anarchic spontaneity, diversity, reformism [...] won the day against military, disciplined, hierarchical, party-oriented, and violent intentional projects” modeled after 1789 or 1917 (p. 304). The concluding contributions, by Abbas Milani on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and Silvana Toska on the Arab Spring, contribute to the

impression, voiced by Milani, that “instead of searching for one ‘Script,’ we are faced with myriad scripts, some aborted, some begetting unexpected consequences, and some falling prey to their own illusions-turned-nightmares” (p. 323).

Unlike the practitioners of the sociological approach to the comparative analysis of revolutions whom they critique, the contributors to *Scripting Revolution* thus renounce any ambition to identify a set of parameters by which the occurrence of revolutions can be explained and their course and outcomes compared. Indeed, questions of origins and outcomes, which were central to the analyses proposed by Moore, Skocpol, and Goldstone, play virtually no role in this volume. Although the notion of “script” and Baker’s emphasis on revolution as “act” suggest a certain predictability to the course of revolutions, the volume’s various contributions reflect a mostly pessimistic judgment on the results of the movements under discussion, which regularly seem to have escaped from their protagonists’ control and ended in failure.

The call for a renewal of comparative revolutionary studies is a welcome one, and Baker, Edelstein, and their colleagues have provided some intriguing suggestions for the directions future study might take. These essays remind us that participants in revolutions inevitably act in part according to understandings and expectations developed before their start, even if these lack the coherence suggested by the notion of “script”. David Bell, in his afterword, notes the emotional intensity that is a common element in revolutionary crises and suggests that the current interest in the history of emotions might productively be integrated into their study. Taken as a whole, the contributions suggest a history of the phenomenon of revolution, from the religiously oriented movements of the seventeenth century through the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the social revolutions of the first half of the twentieth century, and the cultural revolutions of an era that may now be drawing to a close. The year following the appearance of *Scripting Revolution* saw major political candidates in several Western democracies campaign on the slogan of “revolution”. For better or for worse, the meaning of the term may be about to take a new turn.

Jeremy D. Popkin

University of Kentucky
Department of History

1725 POT, University of Kentucky, Lexington KY 40506 USA

E-mail: popkin@uky.edu

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BALL, JEREMY. *Angola’s Colossal Lie. Forced Labor on a Sugar Plantation, 1913–1977*. [African History, Vol. 4.] Brill, Leiden 2015. xvi, 199 pp. €49.00; \$63.00.

CLEVELAND, TODD. *Diamonds in the Rough. Corporate Paternalism and African Professionalism on the Mines of Colonial Angola, 1917–1975*. Ohio University Press [etc.], Athens, OH, 2015. xv, 289 pp. Ill. \$32.95.

Angola’s Colossal Lie by Jeremy Ball and *Diamonds in the Rough* by Todd Cleveland present to the scholarly world two different but rather complementary narratives on forced