

KURT WEYLAND: *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

This ambitious exercise in large area and *longue duree* comparative historical analysis displays an impressive knowledge of a large variety of complex political processes, and manages to fit them fairly persuasively into an overarching analytical framework that aims to uncover a deeper structural reality. In brief, the big theoretical claims of this book are i) that, contrary to overly rationalist accounts, the actors involved in episodes of democratic contention often rely on highly simplified heuristics to judge how to proceed, and ii) this can lead to extremely rapid diffusion of unrealistic or inappropriate demands for regime change that are therefore highly likely to backfire, so iii) there is an inverse relation between the spread of diffusion of democratic contention and its chance of success. By contrast with 1848, Weyland commends the slower and more organized progression of democratization episodes that he documents in late twentieth-century Latin America. He also uses the intervening experiences of Europe between 1917 and 1919 as a further validity check for his thesis. Chile after the Pinochet dictatorship rates particularly extended and approving treatment. In the same vein, although separately from this book, the author has also analysed the “arab spring” events of 2011 as a further confirmation of his thesis — hasty, reckless, and provocative actions that were therefore destined to fail, as in 1848.

The book is an impressive achievement, and the core arguments are both challenging and plausible. In a short review it is hard to both comment on the many striking detailed points and still do justice to the big thesis. For this review, I will briefly offer some fairly marginal observations about the Latin American interpretations before focusing on the strengths and limitations of the underlying analysis.

Weyland knows his Latin American material well, and presents a scholarly and balanced synthetic narrative and more directly researched material. Nevertheless there are important issues of interpretation which can be challenged, and these are not mere niggles— they could affect the argument as a whole. One example concerns the attempted assassination of Pinochet in September 1986. This nearly succeeded, but its failure proved a crucial turning point. Weyland’s sources stress the impact of Communist violence on socialist and centrist assessments of their true intentions. But he does not consider the alternative reason why both centrists and even pro-Pinochet soft-liners reacted by redoubling their commitment to a negotiated *salida*. Arguably more powerful than distrust of the revolutionary left was fear of the revenge that might have been taken by regime hardliners had the

assassination plot succeeded. The broader implications of this shift in perspective would be i) authoritarian regimes that rule through repression leave a powerful legacy of fear, and its reactivation can be the most powerful of “heuristics”, ii) diffusion (in this case imitation of the Sandinista example) is a subtle and far from linear process that may be modified by domestic perceptions and sense of national difference, and iii) even in the most gradual and organized processes of incremental social learning there can be pivotal episodes where the outcome could go either way, and where the accidents inherent in political violence outweigh the orderly unfolding of elite bargains and institutional compromises. This example also indicates the power of ideational/ ideological factors. It was not just the life of the dictator, or the route out of personal rule, that was at stake here. It was also the acceptance or reversal of a socio-economic model—what kind of democracy could post-Pinochet Chile aspire to, and what economic privileges would have to be accepted (or alternatively overturned)? Of course those remain contentious issues in Chile—and throughout South America—to this day, notwithstanding what Weyland calls the shift from “transgressive” to “contained” contentiousness that gradually took hold at the end of the last century.

These observations about Chile also provide food for thought about the underlying thesis of the book. So called “waves” tend to crest rapidly and then pass on. But democratic contention is more durable and prone to recur. Thus, although the idealists of 1848 and 2011 were unquestionably too hasty and over-optimistic about their “springs” it does not necessarily follow that they achieved nothing. Even in the short run there were some advances to partially compensate for the terrible setbacks (Switzerland and Denmark after 1848, Tunisia after 2011). A generation after 1848 many of the aims of the revolutionaries were still lodged in the collective consciousness, and indeed a sadder and wiser cohort of reformers often implemented many of the policies that the early radicals had yearned for. Likewise, in Chile today, the gradual dismantling of Pinochet’s legacies remains a work in progress.

So what about the three key propositions informing the book as a whole? In my opinion Weyland makes a powerful case—both theoretical and empirical—for his emphasis on “heuristics” as opposed to elaborate rational calculations of consequences. But—as illustrated by Chile in 1986—I would give more attention to the issue of generalized fear. Why did the spirit of “springtime” spread so far and so fast in 1848 and 2011? Because spectacularly visible public performances abruptly lifted the climate of fear that European monarchs / Arab dictators had inculcated across large regions up to that moment. If this is correct, then it was not a matter of choice when or where these outpourings of popular democratic sentiment would occur, nor can we be surprised at the scale and brutality of the retaliation it evoked. There are always lessons to be

learnt from historical experiences, but it was the powerholders rather than the challengers who did most of the short-term learning, and they naturally turned to the tools most familiar to them. Is it true that slower diffusion would have produced better outcomes? I doubt whether that option was available on either of the dates mentioned. Weyland's deep theory rests on few cases—my reading of the fall of the Berlin Wall suggests a counter-example.

Laurence Whitehead

Nuffield College, Oxford University

FERNÁNDEZ L'HOESTE AND PABLO VILA, (EDS). *Cumbia! Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013.

This volume of essays explores the phenomenon of cumbia music and its variants as a diasporic cultural form, pushed by migrants and migrations from Colombia to Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay and the United States. The popularity, diversity, and adaptability of cumbia music as a “non-hegemonic” cultural expression offers an intriguing scenario to scholars of Latin American popular culture--for here is a musical format that has spread widely as part of immigration networks, operating relatively free from the power of corporate labels, especially in its initial ascent.

This study of cumbia contemplates the role that culture plays in modulating regional and local identities in relationship to state power through the circulation of music--both as live performance and in technically-dependent formats. It encompasses an impressive swath of geography. The essays pay attention to inter-country regional complexities that contribute to the many variegations of this musical genre. Though never explicitly, the essays revisit territory introduced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer about the relationship between the state and art in the age of the “culture industry.” The argument from their well-known essay, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1944) is that under a capitalist economy, culture could not spontaneously arise from below but would rather be dependent on the interests of power and money. Can music and other forms of technologically dependent cultural expression remain free from state cooptation? While these essays argue that cumbia is not divorced from the vested interests of radio play, record companies, the Latin Grammy awards, and other more hegemonic forms of cultural producers, they generally paint a picture of a musical genre that has flowed on its own terms, through a grassroots parlay of bootleg tapes, transnational deejays, and innovative public