

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Chronotope of Revolution. 'Volcanic' Narrations of the Haitian Revolution

Florian Kappeler

University of Göttingen, DE

F.Kappeler@gmx.de

The article considers the significance of geological metaphors in German narrations of the Haitian Revolution. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, volcanic eruptions served as key metaphors for revolutionary events. At the same time, in geological discourse volcanic eruptions were themselves described as 'revolutions of the earth'. Moreover, geological metaphors have to be considered a constitutive part in the formation of the modern concept of 'revolution' itself. The key argument of this article is that in depicting the geological nature of Haiti as 'revolutionary', the country was regarded as a privileged site for political revolutions: a chronotope of revolution. This had a strong impact on narrations of the Haitian Revolution, particularly on their temporal dimension that concerned the abruptness of events on one the hand and their long-term conditions on the other, which were related to two geological paradigms, catastrophism and uniformitarianism. Finally, the article discusses how natural tropes of revolution affected the idea of subaltern agency.

**Keywords:** Haitian Revolution; German Reception; Geology; Metaphor; Chronotope; Narration

## I On Genealogy and Geology. Metaphors of Volcanic Eruption and the Modern Concept of Revolution

In German writings on the Haitian Revolution in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century the volcanic eruption was one of the most common metaphors for the overthrow of colonial rule in the former French colony St. Domingue. One of the first examples of this relation between geological events and the political revolution is the chapter *Schilderung der Revolutions-Helden und des ehemaligen und gegenwärtigen Zustandes von St. Domingo* (*Portrayal of the Revolutionary Heroes and the former and present state of St. Domingo, 1821*) that was part of a travelogue in two volumes, *Reise durch die Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika* (*Journey through the United States of North-Amerika*) (1820/21), published by the Prussian lieutenant Johann Valentin Hecke.<sup>1</sup> In this text, Hecke compared the plantations that were set on fire by revolutionary slaves with erupting volcanoes seen from afar: 'aus größerer Entfernung hatte es den Anschein einer Menge von Vulkanen' ('from a great distance, it gave the impression of many volcanoes', Hecke 1821: 202).

As Hecke himself states, he adopted this simile from the Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791) and the French general François Joseph Pamphile de Lacroix (1774–1841), who was involved in the Napoleonic attempt to recapture the colony and whose *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue* (1819) were well-received among German writers at that time. Hecke's text also testifies to a general interest in the Haitian events in the German-speaking world. He sympathized strongly with some consequences of the Haitian Revolution, in particular the abolition of slavery:

Wenn Revolutionen solche schöne Früchte tragen; dann muß man jeder Revolution gegen Sklaverei Glück und Segen wünschen! (Hecke 1821: 244)

If revolutions bear such beautiful fruits, then one has to wish fortune and blessings to all revolutions against slavery!

But for what reason were German-speaking authors at this time interested in and sometimes enthusiastic about the Haitian Revolution – and why did they compare it with volcanic outbreaks? An answer to the first question can be found in Hecke's universalistic abolitionism, which was linked to an attempt to open up new sales markets for the Prussian industry. For example, he mentions the central role of Prussian military and German merchants in Haiti (Hecke 1821: 218, 235) and considers the sovereign state Haiti to be 'zum Wiederaufleben des preussischen Handels und der

<sup>1</sup> Although the book was only for sale on a subscription basis and had a limited edition, it was reviewed in the well-known *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (*Universal Literary Review*).

Manufaktural-Industrie sehr wesentlich nothwendig' ('necessary to the revitalisation of Prussian commerce and manufacturing industry', Hecke 1821: 192). Such was a common view in the 1820s when Prussia, as one of the first European countries, tried to establish trade relations with Haiti (Zeuske 1991: 285ff.).

However, as soon as 1804, Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz (1743–1812), the editor of the journal *Minerva*, claims: 'Die Augen der Welt sind jetzt auf St. Domingo [...] gerichtet' ('The eyes of the world are now on St. Domingo') (Minerva 1804: 340). Indeed there was a broad transatlantic discussion on the successful liberation of Haiti from slavery and colonialism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Daut 2015). In France, publications on Haiti were censored after the defeat of the Napoleonic army in 1803, and it was only after the suspension of censorship in 1817 that it became a central issue again, especially in the context of the abolition of the slave trade in France and the recognition of the Haitian state in 1825 (Lammel 2015: 126ff., 165f.). By contrast, in the German-speaking countries (and also in Britain, cf. Hörmann 2010) that were not directly involved in the Haitian Revolution there was a broader debate during the years of the revolution and in the following decades.

Although the German debates on the events in Haiti are almost unknown today, they played a crucial role at that time (Schüller 1992) and the Haitian Revolution was as a turning point in the history of colonialism, if not the history of mankind. Among many others, the Swiss periodical *Miszellen für die neueste Weltkunde (Miscellanies of the Latest Global History)* states that the Haitian slave liberation had an impact on the global system of European colonialism as a whole: 'Die Freierklärung der Sklaven [...] erschütterte die Grundpfeiler des Kolonialsystems.' ('The declaration of independence of the slave population has been a blow to the cornerstones of the colonial system') (Miszellen 1807: 274). And in a preface to a report of Toussaint Louverture on the events in Haiti the editor of the journal *Frankreich im Jahre 1802. Aus den Briefen deutscher Männer in Paris (France in the Year of 1802. From the Letters of German Men in Paris)* proclaimed:

Selten war wol während der ganzen französischen Revolution die Erwartung gespannter, als jetzt [...] über den Ausgang der Begebenheiten von St. Domingo. Wie er auch sey: Eine für die Menschheit wichtige Entscheidung wird aus ihm hervorgehen. (Frankreich 1802: 72)

During the entire French Revolution, anticipation was rarely higher than it is now [...] with regard to the events in St. Domingo. Whatever does transpire, a crucial decision for mankind will come out of it.

The revolution of the Haitian slaves was also a pivot point for German debates on slavery, 'race' and the modern revolution itself. Particularly in history books of the 1820s and 1830s that addressed the Haitian Revolution, racism, slavery and eurocentrism were challenged (Kappeler 2016). For instance, narratives of economic productivity reacted to the abolition of slavery in Haiti. While the revolution in Haiti was seen as a destructive force at first, it became part of a narrative of the modernization of capitalist and colonial rule. A second narrative of Toussaint (and sometimes other revolutionary leaders) as extraordinary great men bridged the gap between the racist ideology and the undeniable agency of non-white people in the Haitian Revolution (see also part III of this article). However, in the following decades the emancipation of the slaves also served as an example of the equality of people of color. Thirdly, narratives of imitation and adoption influenced the debate about the Haitian Revolution: The revolution was narrated as an imitation of the French Revolution until the 1820s, when it was depicted as an indigenous revolution with a specific character. Sometimes its agents were, such as in Hecke's travelogue, even seen as a revolutionary avant-garde.

The German reception is also of particular importance as the Germans considered themselves as preeminent historians of revolutions that were seen from afar. In the *Versuch einer Geschichte der europäischen Colonien in Westindien (Essay on the history of the European Colonies in West India, 1831)*, which dedicates 50 pages to the Haitian Revolution, the Brandenburgian geographer and historian Karl Eduard Meinicke (1803–1876), a person deeply interested in volcanism, claims the historical criticism of sources (*Quellenkritik*) as a German invention, while using Anglo-American writings only as 'Quelle für künftige Forschungen' ('sources for future research'): 'Dem Deutschen gebührt das Verdienst, auch hier die richtigere Bahn [...] zuerst betreten zu haben' ('Here too, the credit of walking the right path first [...] belongs to the Germans', Meinicke 1831: VI). Such epistemic nationalism implies a hierarchical division of labor: Americans and Brits were to provide original sources, which could only become the material of a reliable historiography if based on the intellectual work of German source criticism.

Indeed, early German historical writings saw translated original sources, such as eyewitness reports or political records in English and French, as material for the production of cohesive historical narratives. While German journals – especially the widely circulating liberal *Minerva* and the conservative *Politische Journal* (Popkin 1996, Buck-Morss 2009) – began documenting numerous Anglo-American and French sources of the Haitian Revolution since 1791 and provided accompanying commentary, original sources in German hardly existed at that time (Schüller 1992). The first German monograph on Haiti, Karl Ferdinand Philippi's *Geschichte des Freistaats von St. Domingo (Hayti) (History of the Free State of St. Domingo (Hayti)*, was only published in 1826. In times of restoration, the interest in revolutions that took place afar and particularly in the Latin American Wars of Liberation increased and the Haitian Revolution became a popular subject of historiography and fiction. Because German historiography was frequently characterized by epistemic nationalism, the spatial and temporal distance to the revolutionary events in Haiti was turned into an advantage. The Germans declared themselves good historians of the Haitian revolution precisely because it took place so far away.

One may in fact suggest that if revolutions are volcanic eruptions, it is advisable to write their history from a distance. Yet the history of this interrelation of natural catastrophes and political revolutions dates back to the decades before the French and the Haitian Revolutions. As early as 1772, August Ludwig Schlözer (1735–1809), a prominent professor of history in Göttingen, focuses on the history of revolutions in politics as well as in natural history in his *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (*Introduction to his World History*, 1772):

Wir wollen die Revolutionen des Erdbodens, den wir bewohnen, und des menschlichen Geschlechtes, dem wir angehören, im Ganzen übersehen, um den heutigen Zustand von beiden aus Gründen zu erkennen. (Schlözer 1772: 1)

We wish to survey the entirety of the revolutions of the earth that we inhabit and the human race that we belong to in order to find the reasons for their present states.

According to Schlözer, upheavals both in the global history of humankind and in natural history matter to historiography. However, natural history is not only connected to human historiography, but also to the genealogy of the modern concept of revolution. Volcanic eruptions were central metaphors of the Haitian Revolution for they affected the formation of the concept of modern revolution itself. Particularly the notion of 'revolutions of the earth' figured prominently in narrations of the Haitian Revolution and primarily affected the temporal structure of the concept of revolution, yet also the latter's spatial dimension and even the modern idea of subaltern agency. Specifically, geology played an important part in the conceptualization of rapid historical changes. Nowhere else is this fact expressed as poignantly as in an article in the *Minerva*: 'Ueber Revolutionen in der moralisch-politischen Welt' ('On Revolutions in the Moral and Political World'), published at the height of the revolutionary events in Haiti and France in 1794:

Das Wort Revolution, dessen wir uns in der Menschengeschichte so oft bedienen, ist aus der Naturgeschichte entlehnt. In dieser aber hat es eine doppelte Bedeutung, wovon die eine gerade das Gegentheil der anderen ist. (Minerva 1794: 12f.)

The word revolution, which we use in human history so often, is derived from natural history. But there it has a double meaning, one of which is exactly the opposite of the other.

The anonymous author argues that the concept of revolution in human history has a contradictory meaning that derives from its use in two kinds of natural history. The term 'revolution' already has a double meaning in natural history, so the contradictory meaning in human history is based on it:

Nach der *ersten* [Bedeutung] ist Revolution die Widerkunft gewisser Begebenheiten oder Zustände nach einer gewissen Regel. Revolutionen in diesem Sinne gehören mit zum Laufe der Natur; sie selbst gehören mit zur Ordnung der natürlichen Dinge. Nach der *zweyten* Bedeutung hingegen ist eine Revolution [...] Störung der Ordnung, Verletzung der Regel, Hemmung oder gar Umkehrung des Laufes der Natur. (Minerva 1794: 13)

According to the *first* [meaning], revolution is a return of certain incidents or conditions conforming to a certain rule. Revolutions in this sense belong to the course of nature; the incidents themselves to the order of natural things. However, following the *second* meaning revolution is [...] a disturbance of the order, a breach of a rule, a repression or even inversion of the course of nature.

The first meaning then refers to a premodern concept of revolution that denoted a cycle within an inherently immutable order of things, as, for example, 'Der Umlauf der Planeten' ('rotation of heavenly bodies') in astronomy. 'Der Mond wälzt sich regelmäßig um die Erde, die Erde wälzt sich um die Sonne' ('The moon circulates regularly around the earth, the earth circulates around the sun', Minerva 1794: 14). The astronomic concept of revolution corresponds to the idea of a cyclical return of the political order in the antique doctrine of anacyclosis. The second meaning is more recent and, in strong contrast to the cyclical sense, correlates the concept of revolution with a disruption of the natural order that may implicate an inversion of the former order and thereby the formation of a new one. This idea of a disruption of the traditional order is a distinctive criterion of the modern concept of revolution that no longer centers on an eternal recurrence of the same.

As I will explain in more detail below, the cyclical and the disruptive meaning are sometimes combined. However, in German Representations of the Haitian revolution astronomical tropes rarely matter; instead, the different aspects of the modern concept of revolution refer to two conflicting geological paradigms, catastrophism and uniformitarianism. According to *Minerva*, the modern meaning of the concept of revolution is related to natural catastrophes such as 'Überschwemmungen, Sündfluthen, Verwüstungen eines Landes durch Erdbeben oder Vulkane' ('deluges, the Flood, devastations of a country by earthquakes or volcanoes', Minerva 1794: 14). In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, such phenomena are subsumed under the category 'revolutions of the earth', a development that occurs in the context of an epistemic shift: The discovery of a (linear) history of the earth (Gould 1987).

This modern temporalization of geology had an impact on the emergence of a linear and progressive concept of revolution (and vice versa, cf. Rudwick 2005) which at the time was an important term for geological catastrophes that reconfigured the shape of the earth. According to catastrophism, a geological approach that was hegemonic around 1800 and

is often associated with the name of the founder of palaeontology, Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), sudden single events are constituent parts of new formations of the earth.<sup>2</sup> Yet in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, uniformitarianism, a theory established by Cuvier's opponent Charles Lyell (1797–1875), became dominant and posited in overt contrast to catastrophism, that the shape of the earth was a product of long-term, evolutionary rather than revolutionary, tectonic shifts.

Thus the modern concept of revolution was a product of a transfer between geology and political history, and volcanic eruption not a metaphor of revolution amongst many others, but a central part in the formation of the modern concept of revolution (Griewank 1992). The geological concept of revolutions of the earth affected the emergence of a new meaning of the term 'revolution' and particularly its temporal dimension that was no longer only cyclical, but also linear and progressive: Modern revolutions anticipate a future in which – after the destruction of the old order – a new shape of the earth or of the state is institutionalized. Therefore, I will trace how the connection of geology and the modern concept of political revolution originated, ask for the ways in which political revolutions and geology were connected, and focus on the role this connection played in the German reception of the Haitian Revolution.

## II The Chronotope of Revolution. Geological Narrations of the Haitian Revolution

Since the French and the Haitian Revolution were closely connected in German accounts and volcanism was a common metaphor of both revolutions around 1800 (Rudwick 2005: 295ff.), I want to explore now whether there was a specific correlation of the metaphor of the volcano and the Haitian Revolution. Due to its geological shape, Haiti is the ideal place for revolutionary events. At least that was what German historians and poets thought in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Seen in this context, the reception of the Haitian Revolution is not an arbitrary example for the use of a widespread metaphor. Discussing two history books and one novel, I will illustrate that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Haiti was depicted as predestined for political revolutions because of its volcanic structure. From the perspective of the current state of geology this is certainly wrong: There are neither active volcanos (and only one extinct one) in Haiti nor is the island of Hispaniola of volcanic origin. The largest part of Haiti is located on the Gonâve microplate, a small section of the crust of the Earth between the North American Plate and the Caribbean Plate. Frictions at the seams cause devastating earthquakes every 100 to 200 years, like the 2010 earthquake that attracted global attention. Furthermore, Haiti lies in a region of tropical cyclones.

Earthquakes and cyclones also matter in writings on Haiti in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the use of the metaphor of the volcano stands out. It seems as if the empirical landscape of Haiti had to conform to the theoretical assumptions (and metaphors) of geology. The European theories of a geological space that was formed by natural catastrophes are adapted to the example of Haiti. Of course, the volcanic imagery was also a central part of depictions of the French Revolution. But no one ascribed a volcanic nature to France. Therefore in France the metaphor is separated from the geological nature of the area where the political upheaval took place, whereas in Haiti it is linked to an imagined volcanic nature. As a result, in the French context, the metaphor makes a prevalent narrative of diffusion plausible by stating that the modern revolution, starting from Paris, spread all over the world. While the revolution can be universalized in this case, the Haitian liberation from slavery and colonialism is metaphorically tied to the (fictional) volcanic nature of the island where it took place and therefore prevents a universalization of the anticolonial slave liberation. This stabilizes a narrative of Haitian exceptionalism that is perpetuated until today (Daut 2015: 605–611).

A vivid example of such an embedment of political revolution in the specific geographical shape of Haiti is the first historical monograph on Haiti in German, *Geschichte des Freistaats von St. Domingo (Hayti)* (*History of the Free State of St. Domingo (Hayti)*) (1826, 300 pages), written by the Saxon privy councilor and publisher Karl Ferdinand Philippi (1795–1852, né Lippert; he changed his name when he converted from Judaism to Christianity). As early as on the first page, Haiti is portrayed as a geological site of revolutions:

Die Insel [...] wird von der Bergkette Cibao durchzogen, bedeckt mit Spuren uralter Erdrevolutionen [...]. Man wandelt an mehrern Gegenden auf Vulcanen, deren Feuerstätten bis unter das Meer hinab gehen; sie bringen von Zeit zu Zeit unter dampfbrüllenden Donnern Erdbeben hervor, die manchmal plötzlich Abgründe aufreißen. (Philippi 1826: 1f.)

The island [...] is traversed by the Cibao mountain range, covered with traces of ancient revolutions of the earth [...]. In several regions, you wander on volcanoes whose furnaces go down as deep as below the sea; they produce, from time to time, with steaming and roaring thunders earthquakes which sometimes suddenly tear open abysses.

As Philippi's book, which is mainly concerned with the Haitian Revolution, begins with a depiction of the geological nature of the country as 'revolutionary', it suggests that this nature is a precondition of this country's political revolution. The particular importance of the invention of a volcanic landscape becomes apparent for the very reason that it is regarded as condition of the frequent earthquakes in Haiti. While the mountains are the visible part of the geological

<sup>2</sup> Cuvier believed – in line with the so-called doctrine of neptunism – that floods were the condition of revolutions of the earth. Contrary to this, the similarly catastrophist opponents of neptunists, the 'plutonists', assumed that volcanic eruptions were the crucial revolutionary conditions.

shape, the driving force of their shifts in case of earthquakes (the 'furnaces') is not visible to the naked eye. But the invisible material structure induces eruptions. The visible volcanoes are, like fossils in paleontology, seen as traces of 'ancient revolutions of the earth' that produced the present landscape of Haiti.

As the tectonic strata are deciphered as the memory of the earth's history, it becomes obvious that revolutions once produced the volcanic geological landscape of Haiti, which is the condition for new revolutions of the earth (volcanic eruptions and subsequently earthquakes). The cyclical and the linear meaning of the concept of revolution are here combined through the basic assumptions of two geological paradigms, catastrophism which states that singular events form a new geological shape and uniformitarianism which assumes that the basic principles are the same in the past and the present. The temporal abruptness of the change ('suddenly') that is typical for the modern concept of revolution is based on a premodern, cyclical figure ('from time to time'). While, from this perspective, rapid change is a particular case of long-term geological structures, Philippi claims at the same time that the cycle is launched by 'ancient revolutions of the earth'.

Although Philippi's book (1826) was written on the eve of the uniformitarianist reconfiguration of geology by Charles Lyell (since 1830), natural catastrophes remain the crucial factor in it, since even the perpetual cycle of revolutions is understood as the effect of a revolutionary break (or a volcanic outbreak). Because a revolutionary nature is seen as an attribute of Haiti, Philippi's recognizable sympathies towards the Haitian Revolution, unlike Hecke's, are not universalized. The temporal structure of the geological concept of revolution also shows close resemblance with a pattern of narration characteristic for Philippi: Specific structural conditions are premises of concrete events. For instance, in a first step, Philippi portrays the social relations between the classes in the colony to give readers a guideline for the interpretation of the events that are narrated subsequently:

Zum besseren Verständnis [...] ist es nothwendig, die besondere Lage der einzelnen Classen etwas näher ins Auge zu fassen [...] [;] so hat man einen ungefähren Überblick von der Lage der Dinge, und kann darnach den Gang der Ereignisse im Allgemeinen beurtheilen. (Philippi 1826: 83f.)

For a better understanding [...] it is necessary to focus on the particular social position of each and every class [...] [;] thus, you have a rough overview of the state of affairs and subsequently are able to form an opinion of the course of events in general.

Only after this description of basic social relations the single events of the revolution are narrated chronologically. While we find only this very abstract structural analogy between the geological concept of revolutions and the narrative structure of Philippi's book, the interrelation is more concrete in the case of Wilhelm Jordan (1819–1904), who published the longest German monograph on the Haitian Revolution (400 pages), *Geschichte der Insel Hayti und ihres Negerstaats* (*History of the Island of Hayti and of its Negro State*, 1846). Jordan was a liberal writer and politician in the pre-March era who became a German nationalist and racist during the revolutionary years around 1848. His account of the Haitian Revolution can be understood as a hybrid product of his political biography, insofar as it is strongly abolitionist and sympathetic with the Haitian revolutionaries, yet at the same time promotes a biological racism that, for instance, condemns sexual relations of men of color and 'white' woman (Jordan 1846: 89). More importantly for my argument here is that the narrative structure of Jordan's book correlates with geological concepts on a more concrete level than in Philippi's. Such is the case, for example, when the beginning of the upheaval of the slaves is itself described as a volcanic eruption:

[A]m 22. August 1791 [...] fand [...] der erste Ausbruch des furchtbaren Vulkanes statt. (Jordan 1846: 161)

On August 22, 1791, the first outburst of the terrible volcano took place.

Um Mitternacht bricht die wilde Schaar nach den nächsten Pflanzungen auf und wächst, alle Sklaven an sich ziehend, mit der Schnelligkeit einer Lawine [...]. Die ganze Wuth, die sich Menschenalter hindurch vergeblich zerknirscht an ihren Fesseln, bricht jetzt hervor, furchtbar gesteigert, wie die Gewalt unterirdischer flammender Gase, die sich erst meilenweit durch Felsen hindurcharbeiten müssen, bevor sie brüllend zum Krater hinausfahren. (Jordan 1846: 163f.)

At midnight the wild crowd leaves for the nearest plantations and grows, attracting all the slaves, with the rapidity of an avalanche [...]. Now all the fury that has toiled away at their chains in vain for generations erupts, terribly increased, like the force of subterranean flaming gases that have to work through rocks for miles before they drive out the crater roaringly.

While in Philippi's book the revolutionary nature of Haiti is the material precondition of the political revolution, Jordan refers to the latter with the metaphor of volcanic eruptions. Thereby the usage of the historical present illustrates the abruptness, rapidity and the break of the revolutionary movement so that the mass of the actors and the power of the eruption is vividly visualized. The longer hypotaxis then reveals the combination of the event with the invisible subterranean conditions. The gases within the geological strata that 'have to work through rocks for miles' encrypt a long-term history. Like Philippi, Jordan draws on the geological concept of reading geological times from the earth. But Jordan's reference on the concept of revolution already hints at the change from catastrophism to uniformitarianism. For instance, he states that the:

Zähe, daseinskräftige, wirkliche Form der Gesellschaft [...] sich nicht nach der Schablone eines liberal-konstitutionellen, radikal-demokratischen oder sozial-gemeindeklösterlichen Glaubensbekenntnisses im Nu wegdekretieren lässt, wie die Revolution gewöhnt hat und jetzt noch wähnt, sondern nur durch einen schmerzlichen, selbst Jahrtausende dauernden Gährungsprozeß und durch eine materielle Umgestaltung aller Zustände und Verhältnisse zu überwinden ist. (Jordan 1846: 244)

Tenacious, vigorous, real form of society [...] cannot be abolished by a liberal-constitutional, radical democratic or phalansterian decree in next to no time, as the revolution imagined and still imagines, but only through a bitter, even millennia-long process of fermentation and a material transformation of all states and relations.

In contrast to Philippi, where structures and events, strata and history, long-term process and rapidity are interrelated and the catastrophist element is finally prioritized, Jordan states the impossibility of overthrowing the old order by rapid actions unless it is preceded by a long-term, but still linear process of material transformation. Thus, a rather evolutionary process is declared to be a precondition of revolutionary events, while a revolution by decree that Jordan attributes to liberal, radical democratic and early socialist movements is assessed as an empty promise. Jordan does not believe in the political agency of the subaltern, but in structural evolutionary processes that will necessarily lead to a revolutionary transformation. This new relation of evolution and revolution refers to the fact that in the mid-nineteenth century the evolutionist paradigm of uniformitarianism supplants the revolutionary doctrine of catastrophism. The new geological paradigm is also received by revolutionists such as Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) – whom Jordan cites (Jordan 1846: 5) –, Moses Hess (1812–1875) und Karl Marx (1818–1883).<sup>3</sup> Certainly, a decisive difference is that the evolutionary forces are social in Marx and at least partly biological in Jordan.

Hence in history books of that time, Haiti is presented as a chronotope of revolution. Following Michael Bachtin (2008), I understand a chronotope as a reciprocal principle of structuring time and space that sets the conditions for narratively correlating events and the actions of characters. In narrations of the Haitian Revolution, time and space are in this sense semantically and materially entangled: Geological knowledge provides patterns that enter the concrete narration of revolutionary events. In Philippi's book the geological shape of Haiti is a structural precondition of the revolutionary events while in Jordan's the long-term and invisible geological process figures as the necessary condition of visible eruptions and transformations. In either case the geology of Haiti facilitates revolutionary events. These patterns apply to the narratives either on the level of the basic structure of narration (Philippi) or with regard to its concrete sequences (Jordan). Narrations of modern revolutions are formed by a geological imagery.

This understanding of Haiti as a revolutionary chronotope, and its concrete narrative form, can further be discussed with respect to the work of Theodor Mügge, the German-speaking author who has dealt most comprehensively with the Haitian Revolution. Born Mücke (mosquito), Mügge (1802–1861), who changed his name because he considered it unsuitable for a writer, authored three literary texts about the Haitian Revolution: *Der Chevalier* (1835) encompasses 800 pages and deals with the antecedents of the Haitian Revolution in the years before 1791, while the posthumously published *Alexandre Petion* (1866, 135 pages) tells about the famous rival of Toussaint Louverture amongst the revolutionary leaders, a free man of color who would later become president of the republic of Haiti (1807–1818).

Mügge's most interesting and extensive work on the Haitian Revolution however is the four volume-novel *Toussaint* (1840) that comprises 1600 pages and – unlike most German fictions – depicts almost the entire period of the revolution until Toussaint's death in April 1803. Mügge abandoned his jobs as a merchant and then as a soldier, identified with the Latin American Wars of Liberation and set out for Peru in 1825 to join the famous revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar (1783–1830). As Bolívar had already triumphed in 1824, Mügge wrote about the first anticolonial liberation, the Haitian Revolution, instead of becoming a revolutionary himself (on Mügge see Schüller 1992, Hornstein 1993, Onana Biloa 2010).

His first success as a writer, *Toussaint* was reissued in 1862 and adapted in an abridged version as a young-adult adventure novel by Otto Hoffmann in 1874 under the new title *Toussaint, der Negerheld (Toussaint, the Negro Hero)*. It was generally well-received in the press and – like Mügge's later novel *Afraja* (1854), which dealt with a meeting between a Sámi and a Danish aristocratic adventurer in northern-Norway – was translated into English by the US politician and diplomat Edward Joy Morris (1815–1881). Although Mügge was a liberal and a friend of Theodor Mundt (1808–1861), one of the leading figures of the progressive group *Junges Deutschland (Young Germany)*, even the highly influential *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung (Universal Literary Review)*, which was connected to the more conservative movement of Weimar Classicism (Passow 1842), reviewed the novel positively and grouped it with the historical novels of the Scottish founder of the genre, Walter Scott (1771–1832). On the other end of the political spectrum, in the Left-Hegelian journal *Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst (Hallensian Annuals for German Science and Arts)* Adolph Bock praised the novel as an inspiration for a coming revolutionary agency in times of persisting restoration:

Der [...] Roman steht schon in der Revolution [...]. So lange wir aber beweisen müssen statt zu bewegen [...], müssen wir lernen und wäre es von Mulatten und Mohren! (Bock 1841: 51)

<sup>3</sup> Although most of Marx' manuscripts on geology were written more than two decades later (1870), he had concerned himself with geology and adapted geological concepts already earlier (Griese 2006, Hundt 2014).

The [...] novel is already a part of the revolution [...]. But as long as we must prove [the possibility of revolution] rather than move [...], we have to learn even from mulattoes and moors!

The length of the novel and the broad panorama of the Haitian Revolution it provides make a summary of the plot impossible in this article. One of the qualities of the novel, however, is its precision, especially in depicting the central historical actors and political factions. For this reason, Wilhelm Jordan attributes historical-critical knowledge to the novel and treats it as a serious historical source (Jordan 1846: 320). In this context, it is striking how Mügge's novel embeds historical facts and political coherences in a description of Haiti's nature. For doing so, the concept of revolutions of the earth and the metaphor of the volcanic eruption are of particular importance.<sup>4</sup> Like Philippi, Mügge moreover depicts Haiti as a natural and at the same time economic idyll:

Diese wilden Berge und fruchtbaren Täler füllen die ganze Insel [...] tausend Pflanzungen von zahllosen Waldbächen umrauscht, mit Blüten bedeckt, mit Zucker, Cacao und Kaffee. (Mügge 1840: 78)

These rugged mountains and fertile valleys cover the entire island [...] thousand plantations, surrounded by countless forest streams, covered with blossoms, with sugar, cocoa, and coffee.

In contrast to a common practice, this idyll does not serve as a legitimation for colonial rule, since Mügge's novel also reveals the violence of the plantation system and juxtaposes the natural idyll with the revolutionary characteristics of the Haitian landscape: 'In der Stille der Nacht hört man dumpfen unterirdischen Donner oft die Thäler erschüttern und Flammen steigen aus der Tiefe' ('In the silence of the night, one often hears dull subterranean thunder that shakes the valleys and flames rise from the depth', Mügge 1840: 79). In another passage, the volcanic landscape of Haiti is deciphered as the product of geological revolutions:

Die hohen Bergketten [...] sind düster und wild. Zeitlose Kämpfe der Giganten, Feuer und Wasser, haben diese Felsen zerbrochen und über einander getürmt [...]. Erdbeben rissen Klüfte auf und stürzten die Gipfel in die Thäler; zerstörendes vulkanisches Feuer hob die Fluten des Meeres, schwemmte das Land an den Küsten fort [...]. [D]ie wunderbare Pracht und Fruchtbarkeit dieses Landes war auch hier mit dem Schrecken zusammengethan. (Mügge 1840: 425)

The high mountain ranges [...] are sinister and rugged. Timeless clashes of the giants, fire and water, have broken these rocks and stacked them on top of one another [...]. Earthquakes have torn open chasms and dropped the summits into the valleys; devastating volcanic fire lifted the flood of the seas, swept away the shore from the coast [...]. The marvelous splendor and fertility of this country was put together with horror here, too.

Counteracting the idyllic colonial surface by disclosing the brutality of the plantation system and slave labor, long passages, particularly in the first volume of the novel, rely on a narrative that reveals the inconsistency of the social circumstances. Such a criticism is reflected in juxtapositions of the natural idyll at the surface and the deep structure of geological nature that is characterized by violent force and horror, as in the quotation above. Geological revolutions, and particularly volcanic eruptions, are presented in a highly dramatic manner and thereby conceived as 'timeless' phenomena in the sense of the paradigm of uniformitarianism. While this passage portrays processes that created the revolutionary nature of Haiti, the revolution of nature is integrated in the novel's second volume into a narration of the political revolution. Thereby nature and politics become interwoven more closely and the contradiction of the fertility of idyllic nature and the horrific force of geological nature are eventually subsumed into a temporal process of destruction and production that is constitutive for both nature and politics:

Die Natur hatte die Revolution mitgefeiert, und [...] man [sah] sie voll junger Kraft überall aufjauchzen, in ihrer ganzen unbezähmbaren Freiheit und Wildheit. Mitten durch den Weg hatte ein Waldbach sich ein neues Bett gewählt, hier abgebröckelte Kalksteine und Gerölle um sich aufgetürmt [...]. Tiefe Löcher waren ausgewühlt, hohe Bäume entblöst und halb entwurzelt [...], und so schien es, als wüsste die Natur, dass Verderben ihr von den wiederkehrenden Menschen käme und sie müsse arbeiten und zerstören, damit das feindliche Geschlecht, dass sie zum Sklaven macht, um zur Freiheit zu gelangen, von den Beschwerden erschrecke. (Mügge 1840, vol. 2: 148)

Nature has celebrated the revolution, and [...] one saw her shouting out of joy with the full power of youth, in its whole irrepressible truculence. Amidst a path a forest stream had burrowed a new bed and stacked up crumbled limestone and boulders [...]. Deep holes were dug up, tall trees bare and half uprooted [...], and so it seemed as if nature knew that the recurring humans would threaten it with ruin and it had to work and to destruct so that the hostile species that enslaved it in order to gain freedom would be frightened by discomforts.

<sup>4</sup> In a few places, the novel shows strong similarities to Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal* (1826) that was translated into German several times during the pre-March era. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the volcano is only used one time in this text.

In this passage, revolutions of nature are not (like in Philippi's and Jordan's texts) conditions of political revolutions, rather both are coextensive. Once more, the political revolution is analogized with natural processes, but in this instance nature is anthropomorphized. Mügge's novel is therefore characterized by a bidirectional tropical transfer between nature and politics. Accordingly, the political revolution has direct effects on geological processes: Nature frees itself from old limitations, destroys them and produces new shapes of the earth. At the same time, it is – in the form of the hypothetical subjunctive – associated with social circumstances in human society or, more precisely, with slavery and with socially productive and destructive forces in general that may be directed against slavery. Domination of men by men and domination of nature by men – in order to gain freedom from nature, but for the price of a new form of domination – both form relations of production that can only be discarded by destroying them and establishing new modes of production. In contrast to the pro-colonial idyll (or as well precolonial idylls) Mügge's novel demonstrates that, although under the regime of Toussaint exploitation has not vanished yet, the post-revolutionary order is capable of reconstituting the natural and economic idyll on a new basis:

Hier standen die jungen Kaffeebäume weissröthlich blühend und einen aromatischen Duft, süßler und stärker, als Orangenblüthen, verbreitend in unabsehbaren, wohlgepflegten Reihen; dort waren lange Felder mit Pataten, Melonen, karaischem Kohl und bunten Bohnen bepflanz [..]. [N]irgend ein grimmiger Hund oder eine Hand mit der Peitsche [...]. Reichthümer, die nicht mit Seufzern und Thränen zusammengeschart wurden. (Mügge 1840, vol. 3: 87–89)

Here the young coffee trees were in white-reddish bloom, disseminating an aromatic bouquet, sweeter and stronger than orange blossoms in unmeasurable, well cultivated arrays; there were long fields with potatoes, melons, Caribbean cabbage and colorful beans [...]. [N]owhere a fierce dog or a hand with a whip [...]. Resources that were not accumulated with sighs and tears.

While the colonial idyll ignores the inhuman conditions of slave labor, most critiques of colonialism are based on a marked contrast between the idyll and slave labor that nevertheless commonly is assumed to be necessary for economic productivity. However, the cited passage demonstrates that the prosperous idyll of Haiti is realizable without slavery. The condition of this realization is revolutionary progress, which includes revolutionary destruction. The political revolution leads to the construction of a new order on the basis of the destruction of the old regime – just like volcanic eruptions. Such a temporal process of destruction and production is, beside spatial globality and subaltern agency, a characteristic of the modern concept of revolution.

### III Geological Metaphors and Subaltern Agency

The metaphor of geological revolutions (and particularly of volcanic eruptions) strongly affected German writings on the Haitian Revolution in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: *First*, the modern concept of revolution itself emerged in large part through a metaphorical transfer from contemporary geology. *Second*, in history books and novels, the relation of geological and political revolutions was analogized with the narrative correlation of structures and events. Narrations of revolution were therefore interwoven with geological metaphors, and Haiti's landscape was narrated as a chronotope of revolution that decrypted a revolutionary form of temporality. This means that authors understood the landscape as a precondition of political revolutions which destruct the old and product a new order. This form of narration was influenced by a historical change in the discipline of geology from catastrophism to uniformitarianism.

When politics and nature are analogized, the suspicion arises that human agency is annulled by the naturalization of the human. At least in Jordan's book, where natural processes are a necessary (not a sufficient) condition of political revolutions, the subaltern are disempowered to a certain extent. If this was generally true, it would have serious consequences: Agency is, beside progressive temporality and spatial globality, constitutive for the modern concept of the revolution (Baker 1990) and is furthermore of particular importance in the case of the Haitian Revolution, since several contemporary accounts (such as Hecke 1821: 196) saw this event as proof for the agency of people of color and therefore contradictory to Eurocentrism and racism. To put it in narratological terms: If chronotopes define the conditions of the narrative correlation of events and actions of characters, does a geological chronotope naturalize the agency of characters and thereby counteract the idea of revolutionary emancipation? Yet there are two other possible ways of approaching the relation between geological nature and revolutionary politics with regard to subaltern agency.

The narrative of the great man provides a first alternative, one in which agency is personalized without ascribing it to subaltern classes in general.<sup>5</sup> Such a great man may be of subaltern origin, but when he becomes a revolutionary leader he distinguishes himself from his fellows: 'Der große Mann, welcher [...] sich an die Spitze aller Ereignisse gestellt hat,

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gamper (2016) understands the great man as a figuration of leadership. Although he does not mention any colored great men before Barack Obama, particularly Toussaint Louverture was depicted as such a man in numerous biographies, journals and historical books in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Daut 2015: 380, Lammel 2015). The figure of the great man is interrelated to the figuration of Black Spartacus known from Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Abbé Raynal that is also mentioned in Mügge. However, the significance of the narrative of the great man goes far beyond the figuration of Black Spartacus.

ist der Einzige, der diesen Vulkan schließen kann' ('The great man, who took the lead of all events is the only one who is able to close this volcano') (Mügge 1840, vol. 3: 118). In most accounts of the Haitian Revolution, the narrative of the great man is impersonated by Toussaint Louverture who was regarded as the crucial leader of the Haitian Revolution in the years from 1794 to 1802 (Lammel 2015). In so far as he guides 'all events', he is the conqueror or, as stated elsewhere, the finisher of the revolution ('who is able to close this volcano', see also Mügge 1840, vol. 3: 32), and therefore immense historical impact is ascribed to him and his actions. However, the effects of his actions even on the revolutionary elements of the earth are dependent on his own analogization with natural forces: 'Wie die Natur Orkane und Gewitter bedarf, so bedarf die Menschheit außerordentlicher Wesen' ('As nature requires hurricanes and thunderstorms, human kind requires extraordinary natures', Mügge 1840, vol. 3: 282).

The power of the great man over natural forces is contingent on his own naturalization as a natural force. Labelling him as 'extraordinary' also denies the agency of the subaltern masses and political agency is embodied exclusively by the great man. This relation of embodiment and the embodied is characteristic for depictions of great men in historical writings, particularly in German historicism (Gamper 2016). The great man is the only one able to command the masses and even natural forces, but he remains a product of nature at the same time. If revolutions of nature and of politics are understood as effects of material structures, great men are only character masks, that is, following a concept of Karl Marx, personifications of evolutionary processes (Jordan) or social relations (Marx). This indicates a change in the conception of revolutionary agency in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century that is related to a turn towards uniformitarianism in geology on the one hand and to structural theories of revolutions on the other.

However, such change does not necessarily have to be construed in a deterministic way. For instance, Mügge reveals the co-extension of nature and politics by attributing natural qualities to society as a whole and human qualities to nature at the same time. In other words, rule in nature and rule over nature are interrelated in a way that reveals both the dependency of society on nature and the transformation of nature through society. Thus, a *second* variation of interpreting the relation of geological imagery and revolutionary agency becomes visible: A politicization of nature. It was Marx who shortly afterwards conceptualized the interrelation of nature and society, semantics and materiality, the humanization of nature and the natural conditions of human society in the *Pariser Manuskripte (Parisian Manuscripts)*.<sup>6</sup> This interrelation of humankind and nature is a condition of agency since acting beyond nature would cause no effects in the world and nature without human intentions is not able to act. In times of global warming and of natural and social disasters such as the Haitian earthquake of 2010, a materialist conception of political subjectivity that at the same time enables a politicization of nature is urgently required. The volcano is still active.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

### References

- Bachtin, Michail M. (2008) *Chronotopos*. Suhrkamp.
- Baker, Keith Michael (1990) *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625527>
- Bock, Adolph (1841) "Toussaint. Ein Roman von Theodor Mügge." *Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, (4): 51/52, 63/64.
- Buck-Morss, Susan (2009) *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*. University of Pittsburgh Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7zwbgz>
- Daut, Marlene L. (2015) *Tropics of Haiti. Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789–1865*. Liverpool University Press.
- Frankreich im Jahre (1802) Aus den Briefen deutscher Männer in Paris*. "Toussaint Louvertures Bericht über die Begebenheiten, welche im nördlichen Theil von St. Domingo sich zugetragen haben." 2: 72–86.
- Gamper, Michael (2016) *Der große Mann. Geschichte eines politischen Phantasmas*. Wallstein.
- Gould, Stephen J. (1987) *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle. Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*. Harvard University Press.
- Griese, Anneliese (2006) "Die geologischen, mineralogischen und agrochemischen Exzerpte von Marx im Vergleich mit seinen chemischen Manuskripten. Ein Beitrag zu ihrer wissenschaftshistorischen Einordnung." *Karl Marx und die Naturwissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*, 31–48. Neue Folge.
- Griewank, Karl (1992) *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff. Entstehung und Entwicklung*. 1955. Suhrkamp.
- Hecke, Johann Valentin (1821) *Reise durch die vereinigten Staaten von Nord-America und Rückreise durch England. Nebst einer Schilderung der Revolutions-Helden und des ehemaligen und gegenwärtigen Zustandes von St. Domingo*, 2. H. Ph. Petri.

<sup>6</sup> There is another connection between Mügge and Marx: The left-wing *Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst* that praised Mügge's novel were founded by Arnold Ruge (1802–1880), a political writer who would three years later publish the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher (Franco-German Annuals, 1844)* with Marx.

- Hörmann, Raphael (2010) "Thinking the, 'Unthinkable'? Representations of the Haitian Slave Revolution in the British Discourse, 1791 to 1805." *Human Bondage in the Cultural Contact Zone: Slavery and Its Discourses from Antiquity to the Present*, Raphael Hörmann and Gesa Mackenthun (eds.), 138–170. Waxmann.
- Hornstein, Elisabeth von (1993) "Theodor Mügge." *Lexikon der Reise- und Abenteuerliteratur*, Friedrich Schegk (ed.), Corian-Verlag.
- Hundt, Martin (2014) "Wie und zu welchem Ende studierte Marx Geologie?" *Sitzungsberichte der Leibniz-Sozietät der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 121: 117–133.
- Jordan, Wilhelm (1846) *Geschichte der Insel Hayti und ihres Negerstaats*, 1. Wilhelm Jurany.
- Kappeler, Florian (2016) "Die Haitianische Revolution: Ein Paradigma der Aufklärung? Geschichte eines Erzählkomplexes des späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts." *Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Gesellschaft für die Erforschung des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2: 202–210.
- Lacroix, Pamphile de (1819) *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, 2. Pillet Aine.
- Lammel, Isabell (2015) *Der Toussaint-Louverture-Mythos. Transformationen in der französischen Literatur, 1791–2012*. Transcript. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839431702>
- Meinicke, Karl Eduard (1831) *Versuch einer Geschichte der europäischen Colonien in Westindien, nach den Quellen bearbeitet*. Verlage des Großh. S. pr. Landes-Industrie-Comptoirs.
- Minerva (1794) *ein Journal historischen und politischen Inhalts*, "Ueber Revolutionen in der moralisch-politischen Welt", 1: 12–36.
- Miszellen für die neueste Weltkunde* (1807) "St. Domingo und die Negerclaven." 1: 273/274, 277/278.
- Mügge, Theodor (1840) *Toussaint. Ein Roman*, 4. Hoffmann'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Onana Biloa, Marie (2010) *Der Sklavenaufstand von Haiti. Ethnische Differenz und Humanitätsideale in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Böhlau.
- Passow, W.A. (1842) "Schöne Literatur: Toussaint. Ein Roman von Theodor Mügge." *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, 4: 417–424, 431/432. Ergänzungsblätter.
- Philippi, Karl Ferdinand (1826) *Geschichte des Freistaats von St. Domingo (Hayti)*, 3. P. G. Hilschersche Buchhandlung.
- Popkin, Jeremy D. (1996) "Political Communication in the German Enlightenment: Gottlob Benedikt von Schirach's *Politische Journal*." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 20(1): 24–41.
- Rudwick, Martin J.S. (2005) *Bursting the Limits of Time. The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution*. Chicago University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226731148.001.0001>
- Schlözer, August Ludwig (1772) *August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie*, 1: Dieterich.
- Schüller, Karin (1992) *Die deutsche Rezeption haitianischer Geschichte in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: ein Beitrag zum deutschen Bild vom Schwarzen*. Böhlau.
- Zeuske, Michael (1991) "Die vergessene Revolution: Haiti und Deutschland in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Aspekte deutscher Politik und Ökonomie in Westindien." *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, 28: 285–325.

**How to cite this article:** Kappeler, F 2018 The Chronotope of Revolution. 'Volcanic' Narrations of the Haitian Revolution. *Karib – Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies*, 4(1): 6, 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/karib.46>

**Submitted:** 01 March 2018

**Accepted:** 28 September 2018

**Published:** 12 October 2018

**Copyright:** © 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



*Karib – Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Stockholm University Press.

**OPEN ACCESS**