

REVIEW ESSAY

Mutiny in Comparative Perspective

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Rebellion, Repression, Reinvention. *Mutiny in Comparative Perspective*. Ed. by Jane Hathaway. Foreword by Geoffrey Parker. Praeger, Westport (Conn.) [etc.] 2001. xix, 282 pp. Maps. £56.95.

This book is not – as its title suggests – a reader with treatises on rebellion, repression, and reinvention, but rather a motley collection of case studies of mutinies. The subtitle, therefore, comes nearer to the mark, at least if one declines to take “comparative perspective” too seriously. But let me first present a brief survey of the contributions included in this volume and then come back to this point.

In Part 1 (“Problems in Defining Mutiny”) Mark A. Weitz (chapter 1, “Desertion as Mutiny: Upcountry Georgians in the Army of Tennessee”) discusses mass desertion from the Confederate Army of Tennessee in 1863 during the American Civil War. Since so many conscripts defected to the Union more or less simultaneously, the author takes it that they acted in concert in defying the military authorities, and therefore did not just desert but actually mutinied. In chapter 2 (“Mutineer Johnny? The Italian Partisan Movement as Mutiny”) Victoria C. Belco puts forward an even more far-fetched – albeit imaginative – argument as to why he considers “Johnny” (the hero of an Italian partisan novel), and the likes of him, to be mutineers. The partisans in question obeyed none, and fought most, of the authorities who tried to control parts of Italy in those days. In my view, such a demeanour is typical of most partisans, and also for that matter of anarchists, buccaneers, brigands, and truants. So why call all those anti-authoritarians mutineers?

The next part (Part 2: “Mutiny and Empires”) contains two cases: one by David J.B. Trim (chapter 3, “Ideology, Greed, and Social Discontent in Early Modern Europe: Mercenaries and Mutinies in the Rebellious Netherlands, 1568–1609”), and the other by Carla Gardina Pestana (chapter 4, “Mutinies on Anglo-Jamaica, 1656–1660”). Trim observes that mercenaries in the service of the Spanish king (who was trying to

reconquer the northern Netherlands), but also those engaged by the emerging Dutch Republic, resorted to strikes if their employers failed to pay them for months on end or if working conditions became too atrocious. Such “mutinies” often took the form of an orderly ritual at the outset of a process of collective bargaining, but were to some extent tempered – at least on the side of the Dutch army – if the mercenaries (for example, English or German Protestants) also enlisted for reasons of religious ideology. Pestana’s account of an episode in the campaign of Oliver Cromwell to conquer and colonize the Spanish West Indies covers two mutinies on Jamaica – one in 1656, the other in 1660. In the first the rebels wanted to go home; in the second they wanted to stay on the island, but as colonists. In other words, in both cases the mutineers – led by their officers – wanted to leave the army.

Part 3 (“Mutiny in British India”) consists of three chapters. In the first (chapter 5, “Vellore 1806: The Meanings of Mutiny”), Devadas Moodley discusses the uprising among the sepoy – led by some of their native officers, and perhaps incited by retainers of local princes – who were unable to endure adverse economic conditions and professional humiliation any longer. He points out that while the natives’ violence was limited and selective (European women and children were inviolable), the white counterviolence was indiscriminating and massive. In chapter 6 (“Military Culture and Military Protest: the Bengal Europeans and the ‘White Mutiny’ of 1859”), Peter Stanley describes the protests by European troops belonging to the East India Company – taken over by the Crown in the wake of the 1857 Indian Mutiny – against their unconditional transfer into Her Majesty’s Service. Within a few days, their demands for the rights of discharge and bounty when re-enlisting were honoured. This section ends with chapter 7, (“The Indian Army, Total War, and the Dog that Didn’t Bark in the Night”), a chapter by Raymond Callahan on the conspicuous absence of mutinies in the Indian army during the two world wars, in spite of highly adverse and stressful circumstances. The author attributes the army’s stability in part to the opportunities, prestige, and modest prosperity that the wartime expansion of the army entailed for large numbers of Indians, and to the prospect of independence.

Part 4 (“Mutiny in Emerging Nation-States”) starts with an essay by Seth Meisel (chapter 8, “The Politics of Seduction: Mutiny and Desertion in Early Nineteenth-Century Córdoba, Argentina”). The author notes that collective disobedience in the postcolonial armies in Latin America was endemic, and he wonders why the Argentine authorities did not explore the causes of these chronic mutinies and debilitating desertions. In chapter 9 (“One Hundred Fathers to None: Success and Failure in Two Wuhan Mutinies, 1911 and 1967”), Christopher A. Reed compares two urban military revolts in China, the first one instrumental in unleashing the anti-Manchu revolution of the Kuomintang, the second one contributing

to the containment of the Cultural Revolution. In both cases the military functioned as arbiters of the revolution. However, while in the first case rank-and-file soldiers rebelled and more or less forced officers to take the lead, in the second instance high-ranking commanders took the initiative in attempts to restore the government and party of a year earlier.

In Part 5 (“Naval Mutinies”) one finds a chapter (10) by Anatol Shmelev, entitled “Mutiny in the Destroyer Division of the Baltic Fleet, May–June 1918”. Being unfamiliar with the specifics of the Russian Revolution, and even less so with the minutia of Petrograd politics in the spring of 1918, I found it hard to understand the intricacies of the struggles between the mutineers from this division and other naval factions, the Petrograd commune and the Bolshevik authorities. Anxieties about the fate of the fleet, confusion, and disaffection with their superiors and with Bolshevik rule appear to have played a role. The second and final chapter (11) in Part 5 is by Lawrence Sondhaus (“Austro-Hungarian Naval Mutinies of World War I”), and supplies the reader with a sketch of the unrest and uprisings in 1917–1918 in the naval bases of the Dual Monarchy, Pola and Cattaro (now Pula in Croatia, and Kotor in Montenegro). The author subsequently examines carefully and critically the literature on the subject, and concludes that the mutinies in question were motivated by social causes (the relative deprivation of the ratings compared with the luxury enjoyed by their officers), class solidarity with workers ashore, and nationalism (in the case of Croats, Slovenes, Czechs, and Slovaks).

The final part (Part 6, “Mutiny Remembered, Recounted, Reinvented”) confronts the reader with the imagery of mutiny – more or less artistic representations of such revolts. Palmira Brummett (chapter 12) engages in somewhat hazy reflections in “The River Crossing: Breaking Points (Metaphorical and ‘Real’) in Ottoman Mutiny”. The author seems to claim that at certain critical stages in military campaigns a river crossing might function as a catalyst for frustrations and thus give rise to mutinous feelings. I suppose all those who have been in the services will agree with me that there are few aspects of military life that do not, from time to time, evoke feelings of rebellion and a desire to mutiny. Chapter 13 (“The Symbolism of Slave Mutiny: Black Abolitionist Responses to the *Amistad* and *Creole* incidents”) by Roy E. Finkenbine will make more sense to readers, with its very brief account of each of these two successful shipboard slave mutinies, and its consideration of why and how black abolitionists brought these stories to bear on their cause. All the qualities and virtues that white Americans claimed African Americans lacked were attributed to black heroes like Cinque, the leader of the *Amistad* revolt. In a final chapter (14) Joel Gordon (“With God on our Side: Scripting Nasser’s Free Officer Mutiny”) examines how an Egyptian film portrayed Nasser’s coup d’état of July 1952, and the reactions of the authorities and the public.

As already mentioned, the mutinies discussed are not – the subtitle notwithstanding – analysed in a comparative perspective. Jane Hathaway, editor of the anthology, states in her Introduction that “We had hoped that our combined efforts would yield a typology of mutiny that would transcend specific periods and locales – in short, a global typology”. Perhaps it is as realistic to expect historians, most of them trained in “idiographic” research, to spontaneously produce a common “nomothetic” outlook as it is to assume that a gathering of sociologists will agree on the “right” theory, or – for that matter – that a bunch of potential mutineers will easily agree on a *plan de campagne*. In such cases, it sometimes helps if a common outlook is available already. Alas, Hathaway looked in vain for something of the sort and confesses that “no publication has addressed mutiny in and of itself or tried to find common ground among the vast array of protests and insurrections that have manifested themselves in mutiny throughout most of human history”.

Well, maybe the editor and her advisers looked neither carefully enough nor in the right direction, for there are at least two previous efforts that could have served to provide a perspective in terms of which the various events and aspects of the mutinies discussed in this volume can be marshalled. The first one is an article – which Hathaway actually refers to in a footnote – published in 1982 by Rose (an American political scientist) in which he discusses the problems of connotations and definitions of the concept of mutiny, and then presents a model of three phases: the *origin*, in which discontent arises; the *act* of collective insubordination; and the *aftermath*, the consequences of the act.¹ The second effort is my own comparative study of strikes and mutinies, which came out in 1969.² Obviously, the latter approach squares with me somewhat more than Rose’s does, so let me try to interpret some of the findings and insights of Hathaway’s volume with the aid of my earlier conceptual framework. Of course, I do not pretend to have developed “the” perspective, but only “a” perspective that can and should be refined, revised, and sooner or later replaced by further or better studies. First, though, I would like to offer a few preliminary remarks about the origins of this project.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, having heard and read a bit about mutinies during my period of service in the Dutch Navy, I suspected that, at least from a sociological point of view, most mutinies could be conceived of as a special kind of strike. Thanks to Peter Stanley (see chapter 6, p. 106) I now realize that this hypothesis was not so original as I once thought it was, for Lady Canning had formulated this idea as early as 1859 when her husband, the then Governor-General of India, had a

1. Elihu Rose, “The Anatomy of Mutiny”, *Armed Forces and Society*, 8 (1982), pp. 561–574.

2. Cornelis J. Lammers, “Strikes and Mutinies: A Comparative Study of Organizational Conflicts between Rulers and Ruled”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 14 (1969), pp. 558–572.

“white” mutiny on his hands and she called the protest “a Manchester strike”. In my 1969 study I concluded that the mutinies analysed were genotypically not much different from the strikes with which they were compared. This type of conflict – which is obviously not limited to industrial and military organizations, but also occurs in government agencies, prisons, educational, and other public institutions – can be seen as a *promotion-of-interests* movement (defined as “a collective action to improve or maintain the position of the group with respect to its income or other work conditions”). In addition, I distinguished the *secession movement* (“collective action to gain autonomy”) and the *seizure-of-power* movement (“a collective action by subordinates to replace a superior or group of superiors”).

Of course, defining strikes and mutinies in terms of the goals of underlings is a tricky business, for organizations, and likewise collective actions therein, tend to have *multiple* goals, goals that *change* over time, and goals that may be *redefined* quite differently (as the “true” ones) by authorities at higher levels. Nevertheless, I became convinced that this is a feasible way to analyse such conflicts in order to ascertain their dynamics, their antecedent conditions, and their consequences. This approach turned out to be fruitful not only in comparing strikes and mutinies, but also in a later study by the Dutch maritime historian Bruijn and his students. In the archives of the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) they found evidence of no less than forty-four mutinies, on which sufficient data were available for further study in sixteen cases.³ In their introductory chapter, Bruijn and van Eyck van Heslinga distinguish two kinds of mutiny: “work stoppage”, the same as my “promotion-of-interests” type, and “seizure-of-power”, which corresponds to the “secession” type.⁴ The authors observe that in terms of the typical sequence of events (“natural history”), on the whole the two types differ as predicted; they also conclude that the conditions stipulated under which “extreme hardship and injustice will provoke mutiny” were met. Let me explain with reference to the notion of a “typical sequence of events” that a promotion-of-interests movement is usually initiated by a “nuclear group with some mass support” and takes the form of a “work stoppage”, while in the idealtypic of a secession movement or seizure-of-power movement a “nuclear group, planning with utmost secrecy” starts with “violence: imprisonment or killing of superiors”. Likewise, the further stages of the conflict are indicated by “typical” events for the two different “natural histories”. The conditions mentioned as favourable for the outbreak of mutiny in cases of extreme

3. J.R. Bruijn and E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga (eds), *Muiterij. Oproer en berechting op schepen van de VOC* (Haarlem, 1980).

4. Clearly, if sailors on an Indianan want to get out (secede), they usually have to start by taking control of the ship (seizing power).

hardship and injustice are: “when there is widespread belief that no serious negative sanctions will be applied”, and “when basic commitments to the goals and means of the organization are [...] weak”.⁵

Can this sociological approach be applied to the mutinies brought together by Jane Hathaway? First of all, the three genotypes mentioned can certainly be recognized in the cases enumerated. The “strike type” aimed at *promotion of interests* is clearly evident in the case of the “white mutiny” discussed in Chapter 6, but also in the Spanish “furies” analysed by Trim in Chapter 3. The second class – *secession* mutinies – is, of course, well represented by the slave mutinies on the *Amistad* and the *Creole* (Chapter 13). Likewise, the two attempts to get out of the army made by the officers and men on Anglo-Jamaica (Chapter 4) fit this category as well. However, one gets the impression that in both these mutinies (1656 and 1660) the “mutineers” tried to end their service in an orderly manner, as in a regular labour dispute. In other words, this certainly looks like a case with multiple goals: an action by the men to promote their interests by seceding from the army, a type of “mutinous strike” quite common when a war is over and the men are awaiting repatriation and/or demobilization.⁶ Finally, if the Georgians who deserted from the army of Tennessee (chapter 1) and the Argentine deserters referred to in chapter 8 followed the lead of those initiators who colluded with one another to find ways and means of escape, then we find also in these two stories examples of this second class of mutiny.

The third type of mutiny – to *seize power* – can probably be discerned in the 1911 Wuhan Mutiny (chapter 9), in the naval mutinies (in chapters 10 and 11, which discuss the Russian Baltic Fleet and the Austro-Hungarian Navy respectively) and perhaps also in the sepoys’ mutiny in Vellore (chapter 5). In the latter case the narrative presented does not provide the reader with clear clues as to the objectives of the mutineers. Were they really trying to restore Muslim rule? Or was this a somewhat crude attempt to improve the quality of their superiors by eliminating some of the worst ones? Or was it just a case of indiscriminate revenge? In the other three mutinies there is evidence that mutineers were not – at any rate not primarily – reacting to appalling working conditions, but that soldiers or sailors identified with their comrades in society at large and revolted against established rulers (an emperor and his supporters in the cases of Wuhan and Cattaro), or new ones (the Bolsheviks in the case of the Baltic Fleet), to attain or maintain the ascendancy of the working class.

A word about the 1967 mutiny in Wuhan (dealt with in chapter 9) and Nasser’s “Free Officer Mutiny” (referred to in chapter 14) would be

5. Lammers, “Strikes and Mutinies”, pp. 562–565.

6. Rose, “Anatomy of Mutiny”, p. 566, mentions “demobilization”, especially as a source of discontent that might give rise to mutiny, and supplies references to the literature on it.

appropriate here. As far as I can tell from Reed's account of the role of General Chen Zaidao *et al.*, they simply took sides in an ongoing struggle between factions at the highest military and party levels in Beijing, so that in obeying one superior or group of superiors they unavoidably disobeyed another. That apart, this movement – like the “Free-Officer Mutiny” – did not originate at the bottom of the organization, and therefore falls outside the classification offered here. In my perspective, strikes and mutinies are seen as protest movements by workers, sailors, or soldiers, while collective insubordination at higher levels is considered to be of a different order and termed “bureaucratic insurgency”, or a “coup d'état”.⁷

Obviously the mutiny studies in the book being reviewed – unlike the two collections by Bruijn and van Eyck van Heslinga, and myself – are not arranged so as to allow one to note the presence or absence of specific events, aspects, or circumstances highlighted in the perspective outlined. It is hard to tell therefore how far the evidence from these twelve mutinies⁸ tallies with the predicted typical sequence of events and the general conditions under which seamen or soldiers dared to defy the moral taboo on, and the punitive sanctions against, mutiny. Insofar as the kind of data salient to such a comparative analysis are reported in these cases, I assume there is a fair chance that further investigation of the original documents will turn out to be fruitful, either by corroborating the theory, or refining or improving it.

Neither this set of twelve mutinies nor the VOC cases studied by Bruijn and van Eyck van Heslinga bear out my original hunch that most mutinies – at least if looked at in terms of the goals of the mutineers – are genotypical strikes. Only four of the sixteen VOC mutinies were of the “work-stoppage” type, while no more than two or three of the twelve cases in Hathaway's collection fit the description of the “promotion-of-interests” type. Nevertheless, it is possible that in the army and navy – and also in the merchant marine – protest movements mainly of the secession and/or seizure-of-power type were officially deemed “mutinies” at higher levels, subsequently prosecuted by the authorities, and therefore documented and thus accessible to scholarly investigation. In all likelihood, many work stoppages or kindred acts of insubordination aboard ships or in onshore military units were, although legally fully fledged mutinies, either informally or summarily dealt with by noncommissioned, petty, or subaltern officers, or presented merely as disciplinary offences and hushed up.

7. Mayer N. Zald and Michael A. Berger, “Social Movements in Organizations: Coup d'État, Insurgency, and Mass Movements”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 83 (1978), pp. 823–861.

8. The unit of analysis is a moot point in cases where the author reports on a whole series of related or kindred “mutinies” (as in chapters 1, 3, 8, 10 and 11). To err on the conservative side, I treated these cases of “multiple mutiny” plus the single ones in chapters 5, 6 and 9 as one each, and those in chapters 4 and 13 as two each.

An Englishman once told me that during his training as a midshipman in the British Navy he was taught the maxim that “mutiny is always the officers’ fault”. According to Rose, this conviction dates back to the days of Nelson and appears to prevail among the officers of the US Navy too.⁹ Of course, regardless of the truth or untruth of such a sweeping generalization, this maxim presumably does reflect a belief – widespread among higher authorities in military and civilian organizations – that forms of collective insubordination more often than not indicate the failure of lower-level officers or managers to cope adequately with personnel problems. Consequently, for functionaries faced with a refusal by their subordinates to work or to obey orders, reporting such disturbances as a serious offence or crime is – to put it mildly – an undesirable option. Likewise, higher authorities tend to loathe such proceedings, fearing the disruption of their organization and negative publicity.

Valle, an American naval historian, presents a survey of mutinies in the US Navy between 1800 and 1861 and pays a great deal of attention to this issue.¹⁰ He describes in some detail three cases – in his view the only more or less authentic mutinies tried as such – in this period where “officers were assaulted and a public vessel or craft was diverted from official control” (p. 108). In addition to these three mutinies of the *secession* variety, he reports a much larger number of incidents that amount to a work stoppage or protest, on account of the abuse of power or maltreatment on the part of the captain or some of his officers, or to dubious charges by superiors of mutiny or of the mutinous conduct of their underlings. Valle then concludes, *inter alia*, that “Work stoppages such as [...] actually resemble the classical definition of mutiny more closely, but it can be seen that the charge of mutiny was only made in these cases by subordinate officers seeking to embarrass a commanding officer for reasons of their own” (p. 127).

If, even in the nineteenth century, the American Navy frequently did not go by the book with respect to mutinies, there is every reason to believe that the tendency to decriminalize desertion and mutiny became even stronger in the last century, while at the same time the resilience of soldiers and sailors – at least in Western countries – might have been lessening.¹¹ In other words, while genotypical mutinies of the *promotion-of-interests*

9. Rose, “Anatomy of Mutiny”, pp. 563 and 572. However, the belief that mutinies are always the officers’ fault is a wholesome prejudice, for it appears more often than not that in the long run such protests have beneficial effects for the rank and file concerned. This was noted in 1967 by Lemaire (see Lammers, “Strikes and Mutinies”, p. 569) and confirmed by Rose (p. 572).

10. James E. Valle, *Rocks and Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy 1800–1861* (Annapolis, MD, 1980), ch. 5.

11. See Rose, “Anatomy of Mutiny”, pp. 571–573, and Joel E. Hamby, “The Mutiny Wagon Wheel: A Leadership Model for Mutiny in Combat”, *Armed Forces & Society*, 28 (2002), pp. 575–600, 592–593.

type might have occurred more frequently in the course of time, there might simultaneously have been a decrease in the propensity of the armed forces – and also, one supposes, the merchant marine – to recognize such actions as mutiny in the legal sense of the term.

The view that work stoppages (alias promotion-of-interests movements) tend to be underrepresented in the study of mutinies raises, of course, a host of theoretical and methodological questions that can only be answered if further research on mutiny utilizes not only the official records, but also diaries, memoirs, retrospective interviews (oral history), and perhaps even participant observation studies or surveys. Let me refer in this connection to Callahan's chapter in the collection edited by Hathaway. The author goes into the reasons why the Indian Army showed no signs of being inclined to mutiny during the ordeals of two world wars. This, I would say, points to a promising social-scientific approach, for it implies a comparison either with the very same army in one or more earlier eras, or with other armies in the same era, when or where mutinies occurred frequently. Of course, in such a comparison one needs to spell out explicitly to what features of the organization and/or its context the difference in frequency of mutiny could be ascribed.

Dwelling a little longer on this theme of comparative analysis, it also strikes me that many authors writing on the subject consider mutinies as specific forms of collective and concerted insubordination in *military* units but then go on to deal only, or mainly, with either naval or army insurrections within the orbit of one nation. This might be an unintended consequence of the fact that different kinds of historian are engaged on these two kinds of mutiny. Naval mutinies, evidently, loom large in maritime history and thus readily catch the eye of specialists in this field. Mutinies ashore, on the other hand, could be *gefundenes Fressen* for a student of military history, another subdiscipline. Both the "wet" and the "dry" sorts of mutiny, of course, may intrigue general historians who come across spectacular instances of such revolts in the course of their study of revolutionary developments in their country of interest. Anyway, all three types of historian, I suspect, tend to focus on a special kind of mutiny in a particular national setting. This would mean that habitual patterns of specialization in history militate against comparative analyses, such as studying the similarities and differences between mutinies aboard and mutinies ashore, and contrasting French and British mutinies in the army and/or the navy for example. Nevertheless, exploring the impact of the national and/or the institutional context on the frequency, the nature, and the consequences of mutiny necessitates comparative inquiries.

Only a social scientist or a jurist, I suppose, would contemplate and advocate extending the range of comparison even beyond the military sector. First of all, one might want to look towards the seafaring sector for sufficiently comparable data. In most maritime nations, as far as I know,

“mutiny” is, in legal terms, also still a crime on board ships of the merchant marine or even seagoing fishing boats.¹² Moreover, looking at genotypes rather than phenotypes, actions (“subversive” in the eyes of the powers that be) to defend or promote interests, to “get out” (secede), or to “get the upper hand” (seize power) can undoubtedly be found in all sort of settings, and therefore lend themselves to comparative study.

At least in the opinion of this reviewer, there can be little doubt about the potential worth of the work of Hathaway and her authors. Not only will this collection be useful as an exciting, and uplifting birthday or Christmas present for all those ex-servicemen who might at some time have felt mutinous, or feared mutiny, it will also serve as a rich source of inspiration for eager historians and social scientists wanting to research this fascinating subject in more depth.

Let me end by stressing the broader, social significance of this field of study. If indeed rank-and-file members of the armed forces in the Western world are more likely than their forefathers to engage in intra-organizational protest movements, inquiries of the sort advocated here are not just interesting from a scholarly point of view, but also relevant with respect to understanding the problems leaders and those they lead face in this type of organization. As to military, or quasi-military, organizations in developing – and perhaps also in developed – nations, it would not surprise me if the phenomenon of mutiny in its more “classic” forms still constitutes a major source of social upheaval there – another issue that really should be drawn into the orbit of this line of inquiry.

12. On the Internet I located – in the *Weser Kurier* of 8 August 1963 – a report of a mutiny aboard the trawler, *Albatros*. Three seamen stopped work (herring fishing), threatened the captain (who had refused to supply them with (additional) alcohol), attacked a law-abiding colleague, and stated that they wanted to take control of the ship and sail to Cuba. However, the captain managed to return to Bremerhaven, where the police apprehended the culprits. Although the press called the incident a “mutiny”, I doubt whether the men were charged and tried for mutiny. It is more likely that they were tried for “assault” or something similar.