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Steven Pfaff and Michael Hechter. The Genesis of Rebellion: Governance, Grievance, and Mutiny in the Age of Sail. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2020. \$39.99 (hardcover).

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Aggrieved and angry men foment insurrection against their government. An incompetent leader and his cronies fan the flames of rebellion. Widespread disease and contagion signal failures of governance, amplifying the grievances of the masses. Wages and living conditions are stagnant or deteriorating. Social order threatens to break down unless ringleaders are punished and faith in governance can be restored.

While reading Steven Pfaff and Michael Hechter's fascinating new book on mutiny, I inevitably found myself drawing parallels with the disturbing events that ushered in 2021 in the United States. Pfaff and Hechter transport us to a very different time and place: rebellions in the British Navy between the mid-18th century and Napoleonic era. Ships in the age of sail were miniature societies, functioning on the basis of communal bonds, seafaring culture, trust in commanders, and a belief in the legitimacy of naval governance. This social order was nevertheless a fragile achievement. Officers might be inexperienced or capricious, conditions at sea could be extremely harsh, and interethnic conflict and other tensions served to undermine group cohesion. Over half a century, the British navy brought more than five hundred cases of mutiny to trial. Understanding the catalysts and consequences of naval rebellion offers the reader a refreshing perspective on insurrection, including popular unrest in modern democracies.

The Genesis of Rebellion is distinguished from the start by the rigor of its empirical analysis. It is the first treatment of naval rebellion that compares ships that experienced mutiny with those that did not, thereby avoiding the selection biases that afflict many studies of mobilization. The data sources are detailed ships logs, muster books, and court martial records, which offer granular insights into the experiences of individual seaman and daily events affecting life at sea. Pfaff and Hechter supplement these archival sources judiciously with qualitative accounts of naval mutinies, including the famous (HMS Bounty), the infamous (HMS Hermione), and those that have largely been forgotten (HMS Panther). The result is a far more compelling explanation of naval insurrection than can be offered by either single-case studies or sweeping historical narratives that ascertain the source of rebellion in relative deprivation or revolutionary fervor.

The book provides an anatomy of mutiny that builds on Albert O. Hirschman's influential treatment of loyalty, voice, and exit. Mutinies could be a source of collective exit from the British navy for disgruntled seaman or a means for them to voice their grievances about wages, inadequate victuals, excessive discipline, or other "ill-usage" on naval ships. The rebellions could be planned in advance, through the mobilization of ringleaders, or arise as spontaneous events that responded to momentary opportunities or provocations. By cross-tabulating these dimensions, Pfaff and Hechter are able to differentiate the motives between mutinies that were essentially armed strikes (i.e., organized voice), those that represented a form of mass desertion (spontaneous exit), and variants in between.

The rich findings that emerge in the book challenge a number of conventional social scientific theories of mobilization. In contrast to theories of middle status conformity, we learn that petty officers were overrepresented among ringleaders. We discover that oaths, a seemingly worthless commitment device among irreligious seaman, were remarkably effective in overcoming defection and free riding. While private incentives often motivated the opportunistic use of resources and individual desertion under mercantile capitalism, Pfaff and Hechter find that shared grievances were more likely to contribute to mutinies than private grievances. Structural accounts of collective action also point to systemic inequality or minority threat as a source of mobilization,

yet the proximate causes of British mutinies tended to involve unanticipated events, such as sickness or accidents at sea. Popular perceptions of mutinies emphasize their potential for violence and (ostensibly) chaotic sequences of events. Paradoxically, however, the mutineers of the British navy often sought to replicate the social order of shipboard society even after they had assaulted or destroyed it.

As is the case with any great work of comparative-historical sociology, the Genesis of Rebellion leaves us with unanswered questions. Pfaff and Hechter appreciate that individual cases of desertion could serve as a safety valve for the departure of disaffected seaman, as well as a source of disruption in ship operations. To what extent, then, can we analyze the collective voice or exit inherent in mutinies separately from turnover among seafarers, who are ostensibly making personal decisions? Poor governance within the naval hierarchy is at the core of the argument, but it is also a somewhat slippery construct. Was poor governance an antecedent that often contributed to problematic incidents such as sickness, spoiled food, and accidents at sea? Or a moderator that accelerated or slowed the adverse consequences of these incidents, depending on the ability of commanders to manage them? And how are we to interpret the problem of poor governance in light of constructivist accounts of mobilization? The men of the British navy surely had much to complain about on their long voyages at sea. But what stoked some grievances to a fever pitch, while others remained at a simmer? In light of modern accusations of “poor governance”, what grievances are heartfelt and based in fact, which ones are results of misinformation, and what grievances are simply convenient excuses for assaulting a social order that one no longer agrees with?

The central argument of the book is that grievances and poor governance drive mutinies, as mutineers react to these adverse conditions through strategic action. The overarching attribution of rationality might give us pause. Seafarers were effectively confined on vessels for months, even years, separated from family, surrounded by disease, subject to physical torture, frequently intoxicated, and engaged in naval warfare. As these ordeals wore on, can we assume that the sailors and officers of the Royal Navy were still thinking straight?