

“Republican” Mutinies in the Spanish Navy: Resonances of an Era of Rebellion and the Erosion of an Empire*

VERA MOYA SORDO

*Historisches Seminar der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Schellingstraße 12, 80799 Munich, Germany*

E-mail: vera.moya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: At the end of the eighteenth century, the large-scale warfare that confronted the major European powers exceeded their financial capabilities. This, in turn, affected the operational effectiveness of their military machinery and disturbed its disciplinary order. Consequently, by the 1790s, French, British, and Dutch naval crews resorted to mutiny on an enormous scale. They were driven by fatigue, harsh conditions of service, and disagreements with higher command. Decades later, the *Real Armada* witnessed a series of riots, resembling those of its rival powers but linked to the struggles for independence in the Hispanic-American colonies. Nearly all historians have overlooked the Spanish case, but the motives and direct consequences of the Spanish mutinies are worthy of explanation as part of global processes driven by the Age of Revolutions. Moreover, they offer an opportunity to improve the knowledge of early modern Spanish naval society.

INTRODUCTION

The history of large-scale naval mutinies is closely related to the development of fiscal-military states.¹ All such mutinies, from the revolutionary uprisings in the French ports and fleets (1789–1794), the Dutch squadrons (1796–1799), and the popular mutinies of Britain’s Royal Navy of 1797 to the rebellious crews of more recent maritime powers such as the Soviet Union (Kronstadt in 1917 and 1921), Germany (Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in 1918), and the

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1. See John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989).

British again at Invergordon in 1920, represented responses to the political-economic efforts of their states under pressure of wartime expansion. All emerged in navies finding themselves in similar conditions favourable to discontent, which included sustained campaigns on the high seas, a significant number of men crowded into confined spaces, inadequate nutrition leading to poor health, rigid social hierarchies encouraging mistreatment, harsh discipline, and delayed payment of wages.

In the naval disciplinary statutes of the European fleets of the eighteenth century, mutiny, along with theft, murder, and, in the British case, sodomy, was one of the most serious crimes, worthy of the ultimate penalty.² Nevertheless, it emerged constantly in combination with harsh conditions of service and the emotional and physical strain on seafarers of sustained endeavour. Mutiny was even more likely when, under the influence of state policies and international affairs, more complex problems affected the function of institutions. Such was the case when pressure and unease confronted European states and societies during the Age of Revolutions (1760s–1840s). A few months before the French Revolution (1789), the spark of rebellion had sparked mutiny in the nation's sailors and dockyard workers, and in the next decade it affected Dutch and British crews, until it grew to a magnitude never experienced before in the "wooden world". Such great unrest has been thought of by historians as a global movement of maritime radicalism, but nothing like that was to be seen in the *Armada* in the same 1790s. However, the crimson tide reached Spain, too, when Napoleon's army invaded at the beginning of the following century and the Peninsular ports and fleets saw further popular uprisings. As communications with the colonies became disrupted and wars of independence were fought, a number of ships' companies on their way to Hispanic America expressed discontent. Beyond complaints of, for example, forced recruitment and that they had not been paid, such incidents exposed ideological conflicts prompted by a nascent liberalism. As we shall see, during the 1810s and 1820s, naval mutinies developed alongside progressive radicalism and a growing desire to engage in politics – which explains why more than one crew ended up delivering their vessel to anti-colonial factions.

2. Under British naval law, as the *Naval Discipline Act* (1661) and the "George Anson Act" (1749) indicate, the practice, planning, pronouncement, or concealment of sedition/mutiny were punishable by death. Also, challenging superiors, quarrelling, provoking internal turmoil, or formulating provocative speeches could lead to prison or even death. For the French, according to the *Ordonnance pour les naval armées et arsenal de marine* (1689), which was valid until 1765, rebellion and sedition deserved the death penalty. In the Spanish *Ordenanzas de Su Majestad para el gobierno militar, político y económico de su Armada Naval* (1748) and *Ordenanzas generales de la Armada Naval* (1793), disobedience, mutiny, or "disorder" could lead to the death sentence (*pena de la vida*), while seditious words might also send a man to the gallows.

What was the origin and nature of these so-called Republican mutinies? What was their impact on the operational readiness of the *Armada* and thus their repercussions on the stability of the Spanish colonial empire? Can they be identified by the same pattern as the global radical movement? Answering these questions offers an opportunity to enrich our knowledge of early modern Spanish naval manpower by measuring their level of response to institutional deficiency and the obstacles generated within the context of colonial interests and European warfare. Firstly, it is necessary to examine causes, actors, and dynamics; and secondly, we must determine how they were influenced by internal or external conflicts in addition to the degree of unification and its impact on the social/institutional order. Finally, from a comparative and long-term perspective, we must establish their place in the widespread mobilizations that shaped the Age of Revolutions.

NAVAL MUTINY AND REVOLUTIONS

John Barrow’s *Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty* appeared for the first time in 1831, followed by numerous new editions and, in the twentieth century, by a series of cinematic clichés that made the naval insurrection of 1789 even more famous.³ Ever since, the mutiny on *HMS Bounty* has attracted the interest of historians studying the general phenomenon of naval mutiny and its repercussions on the maintenance, breakdown, and restoration of order in state mechanisms. This, after all, is what military institutions are.⁴ A series of studies have been done of both individual and large-scale uprisings, principally British and North American – from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries – as well as of Russian and German mutinies during the Great War.⁵ Those studies have demonstrated the existence of a long tradition of collective action among maritime communities and its impact on social and political structures.

For our particular period of interest here, the British riots of 1797 have produced more literature, dating from the nineteenth century to the present.⁶ A

3. Frank Lloyd (USA, 1935), Lewis Milestone (USA, 1962), and Roger Donaldson (Great Britain, 1986).

4. Michael Taylor, *The Possibility of Cooperation* (New York, 1997). See also Jane Hathaway, *Rebellion, Repression, Reinvention: Mutiny in Comparative Perspective* (Westport, CT, 2001).

5. For example, Edgar A. Haine, *Mutiny on the High Seas* (New York, 1992); Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis, MD, 1992); and Richard Woodman, *A Brief History of Mutiny* (New York, 2005).

6. See the works of William Johnson Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore: With an Enquiry Into Its Origin and Treatment, and Suggestions for the Prevention of Future Discontent in the Royal Navy* (London, 1842); Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester, 1913); G.E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London, 1935); and James Dugan, *The*

turning point in the traditional narrative came when E.P. Thompson suggested that they might have been prompted by revolutionary struggle,⁷ triggering a debate about whether radical foundations existed or not. R. Wells stated that the mutinies were indeed influenced by external politics and managed by a radical minority.⁸ More strongly, Julius Scott⁹ and, later, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker¹⁰ argued that the mutinies did indeed represent a global mass movement on the lower decks, which emerged from the radicalism and republican reforms developed during the Age of Revolutions. The latter authors argued that the collectivism of the “Atlantic proletariat” developed an effective radicalism to resist established authority; their work highlighted an element overlooked by traditional historiography, namely the role of sailors (mainly Anglo-Afro communities) in spreading revolutionary ideas overseas. For their part, I.R. Christie and N.A.M. Rodger lean more in favour of the argument that the British mutineers employed a cooperative power forged by centuries of tradition.¹¹ Others seek to position their arguments between the extremes. I. Land, for instance, denies any uniformity due to radicalism or loyalty among sailors but posits instead a multi-identity working class seeking to adapt to the requirements of the moment.¹² In tune with Land, Christopher Doorne and Ann Veronica Coats have uncovered certain radical elements at Nore and in some of the delegates of Spithead,¹³ although not in the entire movement. Recently, following John Brewer’s “counter-theatre” concept, Callum Easton has presented an original view that appropriation of naval symbols and practices of authority, in combination with sailors’

Great Mutiny (New York, 1965). Of particular interest are the sociological perspectives of Michael Hechter *et al.*, “Grievances and the Genesis of Rebellion: Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1740 to 1820”, *American Sociological Review*, 81:1 (2016), pp. 165–189; and Steven Pfaff *et al.*, “The Problem of Solidarity in Insurgent Collective Action: The Nore Mutiny of 1797”, *Social Science History*, 40:2 (2016), pp. 247–270, which apply case-control and event-history methodologies to generate predictive models to represent variables that influenced the organization, connections, and duration of mutinies.

7. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1963).

8. R. Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795–1803* (Gloucester, 1983).

9. Julius Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century”, in Robert L. Paquette and Stanley Engerman (eds), *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* (Gainesville, FL, 1996).

10. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000).

11. I.R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984); N.A.M. Rodger, “Mutiny or Subversion? Spithead and the Nore”, in Thomas Bartlett *et al.* (eds), *1789: A Bicentenary Perspective* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 549–564.

12. I. Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750–1850* (New York, 2009).

13. Christopher Doorne, “A Floating Republic? Conspiracy Theory and the Nore Mutiny of 1797”, and Ann Veronica Coats, “The Delegates: A Radical Tradition”, in Ann Veronica Coats and Philip MacDougall (eds), *The Naval Mutinies of 1797: Unity and Perseverance* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 179–193, 39–60.

traditions of resistance, resulted in new power structures springing from the organization of the mutinies.¹⁴

An understanding of the phenomenon through the perspective of radicalism and an egalitarian culture within North Atlantic maritime communities¹⁵ continues to influence the Anglophone historiography. Niklas Frykman has led the argument towards a “single radical movement, a genuine Atlantic revolution” in the British, French, and Dutch navies of the period.¹⁶ Although revolts began over specific grievances or against certain officers, Frykman noticed that, during the course of events, the mutineers began to articulate a “common political ideology” of “lower-deck republicanism”. Later, along with Clare Anderson, Lex Heerma van Voss, and Rediker, Frykman proposed the concept of “maritime radicalism” to frame types of collectivism, anti-authoritarianism, and egalitarianism.¹⁷

The notion of radicalism did not escape the notice of French historians, too, who while studying *La Royale* considered that their mutinies represented the first large-scale manifestations of the late eighteenth century, inextricably connected with the French Revolution. William S. Cormack agrees that, being naturally disobedient, French seamen were fertile ground for political influence.¹⁸ However, contrary to the traditional argument that external political conflicts suddenly erupted within the social “equilibrium” of the pre-revolutionary navy, Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer have shown that even before the outbreak of civil war and its spread across the country, there existed a collective claiming spirit among the sailors and petty officers who participated in the revolts of Toulon.¹⁹ While the uprisings that greatly intensified during the civil war and the subsequent imposition of the Republic and the Empire have been well studied,²⁰ historians have not openly aligned themselves over maritime radicalism as a central hypothesis. Indeed, that is probably not necessary in any case, because the Revolution was a radical movement in itself. In fact, it may be said that too few studies centre on French naval mutinies in general, with the exception of that of Alain Cabantous, who pointed out the

14. Callum Easton, “Counter-Theatre during the 1797 Fleet Mutinies”, in *International Review of Social History*, 64:3 (2019), pp. 389–414.

15. Niklas Frykman, *The Bloody Flag: Mutiny in the Age of Atlantic Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 2020).

16. *Idem*, “Connections between Mutinies in European Navies”, *International Review of Social History*, 58:SI21 (2013), pp. 87–107.

17. Clare Anderson *et al.*, “Mutiny and Maritime Radicalism in the Age of Revolution: A Global Survey”, *International Review of Social History*, 58:SI21 (2013).

18. William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789–1794* (Cambridge, MA, 1995).

19. Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer, *Marines et Révolution* (Paris, 1988), and Jean Meyer and Martine Acerra, *Histoire de la marine Française. Des origines à nos jours* (Rennes, 1994).

20. See the works of Auguste Thomazi, *Les marins de Napoléon* (Paris, 2004), and Jean-José Ségéric, *Napoléon face à la Royal Navy* (Paris, 2008).

remarkable absence of episodes recorded before 1789, compared with the insurrectional maelstrom that began in that year and permeated the fleets and arsenals.²¹ The predominant focus is rather on the revolutionary conflict between popular and executive authority, and its impact in undermining the hierarchical and disciplinary system of the ancien régime.

The idea of a process of global collectivism connected with the naval eruptions raises the question of where other European crews fit into the discussion. Apart from the British case, many questions remain about individual and collective manifestations that occurred in other imperial fleets of the period. For example, even if it is well known that there were mutinies in the Dutch VOC merchant fleet,²² apart from the comparative work of Niklas Frykman almost no research has been conducted into riots in the Dutch navy, and none of the aforementioned literature has considered the position of the Spanish *Armada* in this so-called single radical movement. Hispanic-American historiography is affected by the same problem, for there, too, naval mutiny has generally been disregarded or overlooked. For example, uprisings might be mentioned – such as those faced by José Pizarro aboard *Asia*, where the trouble concerned sailing conditions (1741–1742), and on *La Esperanza*, where it was caused by non-payment (Callao, Peru, 1743) – but there is never any closer interrogation of their origins and dynamics. The same absence of details can be seen in Jorge Cerdá Crespo's study of colonial conflicts during the Nine Years' War.²³ Contemporary sources mention these incidents in a report commissioned by the Spanish Naval Minister, the Marquis of Ensenada, which covered the military, administrative, political, and religious status of the vicerealties (1735–1745). From this, we learn of more riots that took place in 1745 in the galleons and garrison at Cartagena de Indias. Again, the cause was discontent over the withholding of pay.²⁴ To reiterate, however, there has never been a proper case study, neither of the shared claims of soldiers on land and seamen, nor of possible evidence for the existence of generalized discontent during the period in colonial ports or on the high seas.

Another practically unnoticed mutiny was the one on the *San Juan Nepomuceno* on the eve of the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), the official report

21. Alain Cabantous, *La vergue et les fers. Mutins et déserteurs dans la marine de l'ancienne France, xviiè-xviiiè siècles* (Paris, 1984).

22. J.R. Bruijn and E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga (eds), *Muiterij. Oproer en Berechting op Schepen van de VOC* (Haarlem, 1980); Jan Lucassen, "A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595–1795", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66 (2004), pp. 12–39; Matthias van Rossum, "De intra-Aziatische vaart. Schepen, 'de Aziatische zeeman' en de ondergang van de VOC?", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 11:3 (2011), pp. 31–68; Richard Guy, "Calamitous Voyages: The Social Space of Shipwreck and Mutiny Narratives in the Dutch East India Company", *Itinerario*, 39:1 (2015), pp. 117–140.

23. Jorge Cerdá Crespo, *Conflictos coloniales. La Guerra de los Nueve Años, 1739–1748* (Alicante, 2010).

24. Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, *Noticias secretas de América* (London, 1826).

on which was published for the first time in *Diario de Cádiz* in 1905.²⁵ Motivated by the crew’s sense of injustice, the mutiny deserves its own critical examination in relation to the state of the *Armada* during the War of the Third Coalition (1803–1806). The *San Juan Nepomuceno* mutiny is a striking illustration of how, considering the magnitude of the riots a decade earlier in rival navies, ten years on from then the authorities still opted for direct negotiation to deal informally with what they judged to be nothing more than disciplinary offences. Another example is the case of the riot aboard the frigate *Trinidad* (1818). It is remarkable that, despite that riot’s being known from general narratives of the Spanish-American Wars of Independence (1808–1833), such as those of the building of a republican fleet²⁶ or the formation of new states, it has never been the subject of further analysis, even though it is a fine example of a case where disciplinary causes, political persuasion, and insurgent conflicts have been considered both triggers and shapers of mutiny.²⁷

Jorge Ortiz Sotelo has presented a broader approach to the context of certain rebellions at the heart of the *Real Armada en el Pacífico Sur*. He has revealed jurisdictional disagreements between naval and viceregal authorities in their efforts to resolve the conflict in José de Somaglia’s fleet, which was another conflict following complaints about sailors’ pay (1772).²⁸ Ortiz Sotelo gives as further examples the cases of *Prueba* and *Venganza* (1822), which took place against the background of the Spanish-American struggle for independence. Rather than such traditional complaints, Ortiz Sotelo assigns greater importance to the mutineers’ political interests and family and commercial ties with the colonies. Those considerations proved to be decisive in the mutineers’ determination to deliver their ships to insurgent forces.²⁹ It should be mentioned here that the continuation of a subversive spirit aboard both vessels when they became part of the republican squadrons, as shown by other studies,³⁰ is worthy of deeper understanding within the framework of economic and organizational problems intrinsic to the process of formation of new political powers.

The absence of studies on Spanish naval mutinies persists in the historiography. Uprisings like the ones aboard *Asia*, *Constante*, *Aquiles*, and *Clarrington* (1825) were, of course, news and highly relevant for contemporary

25. See also *La Campaña de Trafalgar (1804–1805)*. *Corpus Documental*, ed. J.I. González-Aller Hierro (Madrid, 2004).

26. Antonio García Reyes, *Memoria sobre la primera escuadra nacional. Leída en la sesión pública de la universidad de Chile, el 11 de octubre de 1846* (Santiago, 1846).

27. Gabriel Di Meglio, *¡Mueran los salvajes unitarios! La mazorca y la política en tiempos de Rosas* (Buenos Aires, 2012).

28. Jorge Ortiz Sotelo, *La Real Armada en el Pacífico Sur. El apostadero naval del Callao 1746–1824* (Mexico City, 2015).

29. *Ibid.*

30. Antonio Cacia Prada, *Bernardo O’Higgins* (New York, 2018), p. 179.

newspapers³¹ – and certainly for novelists.³² Indeed, such narratives are still part of traditional discourse, given as examples of anarchy and treason against the monarchy,³³ or perhaps patriotism in the republican struggle.³⁴ These cases and others, documentation of which I have found in Spanish and Mexican archives,³⁵ have still not been used for comparative purposes or subjected to any other evaluation to assess whether they might be evidence of a common socio-political movement, especially in the context of global warfare. In the following pages, therefore, we shall examine the evolution on the dynamics of naval communities in terms of how and why they express disagreements. I shall begin by reviewing the disciplinary background of the *Armada* throughout the eighteenth century and the influence of the revolutionary process during its later period. A transition will be observed, the product of a progressively liberal and republican influence that later generated more radical uprisings during the 1820s. While not of the same magnitude as the French or British cases, and certainly not always revolutionary or radical, nevertheless they affected the process of global challenge to the ancien régime.

A SILENT UNEASE AMONG THE SPANISH CREWS

From the early decades of the eighteenth century, the *Armada* experienced disciplinary problems within its ships' companies, with seamen and soldiers rebelling repeatedly, mainly over non-payment, although admittedly the rebellions were never as extensive as those in Flanders in 1589 and 1607, which involved between 3,000 and 4,000 mutineers.³⁶ Some of the first known cases in the *Armada* were the 100 members of the fleet commanded

31. *Guía de Forasteros. Estanquillo literario para los años de 1825–1826*, Year III, vol. IV, 6 (54), p. 1.

32. The events inspired Jules Verne's first novel, *Un drame au Mexique* (Paris, 1845) and Luis Delgado Bañón, *El navío Congreso Mexicano. Motín a bordo* (Barcelona, 2012).

33. Cesáreo Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada española desde la unión de los reinos de Castilla y Aragón* (1895–1903), vol. IX (Madrid, 1972), p. 312.

34. Carlos López Urrutia, *Historia de la Marina de Chile* (Santiago de Chile, 1968), p. 227.

35. Mainly port notices, official reports, communications, and correspondence between authorities (ship or port commanders, naval secretaries, viceroys) in archives: General de Simancas [hereafter, AGS]; General de Indias, Seville [hereafter, AGI]; Museo Naval, Madrid [hereafter, AMN]; General de Marina Álvaro de Bazán, Viso del Marqués [hereafter, AGMAB]; and Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City [hereafter, AGN]. A problem to consider is that there are gaps in the archives. For example, two different cases of insubordination by midshipmen found in the AGMAB index cannot be detailed since the records are lost (charges against midshipmen Pablo Cossa Llantazo for jailbreak, missing guard duty, and disobedience to superiors, 22 February 1757 to 28 November 1758; and San Juan Calderón, Antonio Grandarillas, and Antonio Vázquez, for indiscipline and "other excesses", 1799, AGMAB 3626C).

36. See Geoffrey Parker, "Mutiny and Discontent in the Spanish Army of Flanders 1572–1607", *Past & Present*, 58:1 (1973), pp. 38–52.

by Francisco Cornejo, who had anchored in Havana in October 1720 while on a mission to expel the French from Mobile, Pensacola.³⁷ Some time later, there was mutiny among the seamen and soldiers of *Incendio* and *Potencia* (Captain Ignacio Dauteuil), during a privateering campaign in November 1733.³⁸ Within Spanish crews, as with any other European navy, persistent pay arrears caused significant difficulties with discipline. The Marquis of la Victoria wrote in his *Discursos* that, because they had not been paid, “they are unencouraged to work with pleasure, cannot be punished for their faults, are filled with hatred against service, they riot, and above all banish their fondness for sea service”.³⁹

The matter was especially thorny in the viceroalties. Apparent reticence on the part of the authorities, reflected in the documentation, prevents thorough enquiry today, but a certain amount of evidence indicates it was a more critical problem than it might seem. Thus, when José Pizarro’s expedition arrived at Callao in November 1743 after an exhausting pursuit of George Anson’s squadron, and once there the men of *La Esperanza* proved insubordinate, the captain advised the authorities that “in a country of such freedom”, without payment, there would be no seamen. Pizarro even offered his own and other officers’ salaries to relieve the debt, a gesture for which there were a number of precedents. Two years earlier, when Pizarro was in charge of the frigate *Asia* off Cape Horn, half his crew mutinied and deserted; then later, in January 1742, of those who had stayed loyal nine more rebelled, whereupon Pizarro proceeded to arrest, try, and condemn those responsible. As a result, two seamen were executed and the others put in irons,⁴⁰ for by that time Pizarro could not allow the loss of any more men.

The affair in Callao also left the Viceroy of Peru, the Marquis de Villagarcía, restless. He wrote to inform the king that he had neither “strength to contain such uprisings, nor treasure to satisfy the aggrieved”, nor did he agree with the mutineers’ proposals, because to break “the constraint of obedience” would give rise to the “resentment experienced in several galleons in Cartagena”.⁴¹

37. Jacobo de la Pezuela, *Historia de la Isla de Cuba*, 4 vols (Madrid, 1868), II, pp. 334–335.

38. Noticia de los motines acaecidos en el *Incendio y Potencia*, AGN, IC, GV, RCOD, vol. 53, fo. 45.

39. Juan José Navarro, “Discursos y diferentes puntos particulares sobre marina que expone á los R. P. de V. M. el marqués de la Victoria (8 de diciembre de 1781)”, in Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, VII, p. 183.

40. José Pizarro a Ensenada (*La Concepción*, 20 de abril de 1743 y 22 de enero de 1744), AGS, SM, fo. 399, in Jorge Cerdá Crespo, *Conflictos coloniales. La Guerra de los Nueve Años, 1739–1748* (Alicante, 2010), p. 181.

41. In a letter, Julián de Arriaga mentions a pardon for a penalty given to the crews of *Brillante* and *La Golondrina*, considering their “nakedness” (*desnudez*) and satisfactory behaviour during Antonio Barceló’s campaign in Cartagena de Indias, where they served without pay. Carta de Julián de Arriaga a Juan Domingo Medina, San Ildefonso, 1 de noviembre de 1766, AMN 0068, VP, vol. XXXVI, ms. 0067/252, fo. 284v.

The Viceroy seemed to fear a “declared uprising and rebellion” in the “rest of the fleet”.⁴² Those were the sailors Ulloa referred to in *Noticias Secretas de América*, a “secret” (and unpublished) official report on the status of the vicerealties. It would be natural for us nowadays to assume that the facts of the case would have been described in more detail, since they caused deep concern among the colonial authorities. However, the chronicle provides no more specific information either of Pizarro’s incident, or of others mentioned by Villagarcía; and, as mentioned above, nothing was said about the part of the garrison at Cartagena de Indias, which had mutinied for similar reasons in April 1745.⁴³ Doubt remains about whether the omission of more particulars was due to a personal request to avoid calling into question the Viceroy’s capacity to overcome problems, but whatever the truth it is clear that possible disobedience caused by lack of payment was always present in the background in the colonies, and that restlessness among the crews anchored in port was shared with soldiers ashore.

Discontent prevailed in subsequent decades, especially after the intervention of Spain in the Seven Years’ War (1761–1763). The development of a project of naval armament in co-operation with France, which, according to Jan Glete’s calculations, enhanced the material and human capacity of the French and Spanish navies by 107 and 85 per cent respectively between 1760 and 1790,⁴⁴ also increased levels of debt. The crews of certain royal vessels, like those of the fleet of Brigadier José de Somaglia, dispatched to the Pacific during the Falklands Crisis (1770), found themselves still unpaid even after their extremely exhausting voyage, which had included rounding Cape Horn and suffering an outbreak of scurvy that decimated the company. Even so, they soon found themselves operating on long commissions in pursuit of English and Dutch ships. It was scarcely any surprise therefore that, in January 1772, after the conflict with England had died down and news reached Callao of a mission to sail to Cadiz with a cargo of gold and silver, even as the ships were still at anchor, the sailors and gunners of *Septentrión* and *Astuto* rallied in mutiny to the cry of, “Long live the King and death to his bad government!”. Yet again, the cause of their anger was their unpaid wages.⁴⁵ Somaglia and his officers tried to contain the situation by detaining three leaders,⁴⁶

42. Quoted in Luis J. Ramos Gómez, *Las “Noticias secretas de América” de Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa (1735–1745)*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1985), I, p. 271.

43. As had happened before in Chile (1710), Cartagena (1726), and Santo Domingo (1741). See Ramos Gómez, *Las “Noticias secretas de América”*, pp. 48–49, 271.

44. Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860*, 2 vols (Stockholm, 1993), I, p. 311.

45. Cartas 520 y 522 de Manuel de Amat y Junyent, virrey de Perú, a Julián de Arriaga, secretario de Indias, 15 de enero de 1772, Lima, AGS 23.9, 652, no. 186, fos 900r–906v; no. 188, fos 908r–916v.

46. See Rubén Vargas Ugarte and Margarita Guerra, *Historia general del Perú. Virreinato 1689–1776*, 10 vols (Lima, 1996), IV, pp. 292–293; Ortiz Sotelo, *La Real Armada en el Pacífico*, p. 97.

threatening the rest with the death penalty. Some continued to resist and, considering the value of the cargo and the fear of further insubordination during the mission, the authorities proceeded to arrest them. After the trial, twenty-two men were sentenced to caning⁴⁷ and to forced labour in the arsenal. As an example to the rest, nine were shot and two more hanged from the mainmast.⁴⁸

Although the apparent hint of rebellion against the monarchy was fundamentally a labour demand, there were unmistakable signs of nascent feelings that later, at the dawn of the new century, would expand throughout the continent. Such demands had been heard before, ashore, and had prompted violent demonstrations against certain imperial policies or sometimes the colonial authorities in general.⁴⁹ Until now, however, they had had nothing to do with the revolutionary convulsion that struck the arsenal of Toulon in early 1789, when workers and petty officers requested the dismissal of their despotic superiors, and the naval ratings demanded advances on their salaries.⁵⁰ Neither can be compared with the thousands of sailors and soldiers who shortly after, in 1792, marched through other French ports,⁵¹ their presence announcing a general uprising against the regime and its royal representatives. Indeed, the behaviour of Somaglia’s crew was far from the reasonably orderly and non-violent, albeit still large-scale demonstration that began aboard sixteen ships of the line of the Channel Fleet, anchored at Spithead in April 1797. Once again, the seamen and petty officers, supported by marines, were demanding payment of their wages and better treatment.⁵² There was also no similarity to the authoritarian leadership that characterized the next uprising at Nore, during which many officers were arrested or thrown overboard, and the threat to sink the ships was held over anyone who did not join the mutiny.⁵³

During the same period of struggle, calm seemed to reign on the decks of the Spanish fleets. It may be assumed that there were isolated riots of which we have no information but which continued to occur for traditional reasons and went unreported in the hopes of avoiding undermining individual commanders’ authority, or exaggerating the importance of the problem, as

47. To hit a person while he is bound to a piece of artillery.

48. Jorge Ortiz Sotelo, “Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, los años iniciales”, *Derroteros de la Mar del Sur*, 14 (2006), pp. 135–146, and *idem*, *La Real Armada en el Pacífico*, pp. 97–98.

49. For example, between 1717–1723 against the tobacco monopoly in Havana, or in 1730 at the beginning of the rebellion of Creoles and mestizos in Cochabamba.

50. Oliver Chaline, “Les mutineries de 1797 dans la Navy”, *Histoire, économie société*, 24:1 (2005), pp. 51–61, 52.

51. Malcolm Crook, *Toulon in War and Revolution: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, 1750–1820* (Manchester, 1991), p. 116.

52. See Kathrin Orth, “Voices from the Lower Deck”, in Coats and MacDougall, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, pp. 98–106, 99.

53. See W. James, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, Vol. 5 (London, 1822), pp. 63–66; and Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection*, pp. 57–72.

Cabantous suggests for French cases before the Revolution.⁵⁴ In that sense, being considered of essentially minor importance, such trouble was probably solved by negotiations between the parties involved, as in the affair aboard the *San Juan Nepomuceno*. This ship was commanded by Churruca as part of the combined fleet led by captain Pierre-Charles Villeneuve, and on 19 August 1805 – two months before the famous encounter at Trafalgar – while stalking a British frigate in the vicinity of Cadiz, tension rose aboard as a number of gunners left their posts to steal belongings from officers. To discover who was responsible, the brigadier deprived twenty-one marines of their ration of wine, but three days later a complaint about the injustice of such punishment came from the flagship *Argonauta*. In fact, the discontent went beyond the lack of alcohol, for when open insurrection began the allegation was added that beatings had been administered other than in accordance with Spanish naval ordinances. In a powerful act of authority and in front of thirty armed men, Churruca reminded them of the death penalty, although he offered the choice between a court martial – with the virtual certainty of being hanged – or acceptance of immediate summary punishment. The rebels chose the latter and their leaders were put in irons. The brigadier, therefore, contemplating the confrontation he was facing, preferred to negotiate with the mutineers than to lose men. Moreover, he realized that their detention would adversely affect the confidence of the rest of the company. Although he considered the affair an “attack of which there is no example in the king’s vessels or navy troops”, the brigadier interceded for the men’s lives and, ultimately, they were sentenced only to eight years in prison. In his final report, however, Churruca confessed that he was unsure if he had put an end to “all the bad” within his crew, for he feared that remnants of the “dismal seed sown by perverse men” could still prevail.⁵⁵

However, even at a moment of such strategic importance, the Spanish noble commanders were not obliged to deal with a crisis similar to one their French allies had faced just over a decade earlier. In September 1793, mutiny was stirred in the crews of approximately twelve ships of the French Atlantic fleet anchored at Quiberon Bay, exhausted and feeling deceived after delivering the Mediterranean squadron from Toulon to Britain and its allies. The mutineers demanded the removal of the naval leader, Morard de Galles, and their own return to Brest. By then, however, the usual attempts to restore calm

54. Cabantous, *La vergue et les fers*, p. 18.

55. Informe de Cosme de Churruca a bordo del navío *San Juan Nepomuceno*, Cádiz, 30 de agosto de 1805, in *La Batalla de Cavite (1898). Textos basados en manuscritos y crónicas de la época existentes en el Archivo Histórico y Biblioteca del Museo Naval de Madrid y Biblioteca Nacional de París* (Madrid, 1972); José I. González-Aller Hierro, *La campaña de Trafalgar (1804–1805). Corpus documental* (Madrid, 2004), and “La vida a bordo en la época de Trafalgar”, *Revista General de Marina*, 249:8–9 (2005), pp. 187–218, 217.

by negotiation – or “fraternal communication” – were to no avail,⁵⁶ for the tension and class antagonism accumulated among crews and officers had already broken the navy’s spirit.⁵⁷ As a result, the National Convention’s response was extremely harsh. Four aristocrat officers were executed while some hundreds more were imprisoned and expelled from the service.⁵⁸ Who, at that time, could have imagined that only months later a number of the British officers who were to help defeat the Spanish navy at the battle of Cape St. Vincent in February 1797 would distinguish themselves in the pursuit of hundreds and the hanging of dozens of their own seamen? It was an unprecedentedly harsh policy to eradicate the spasms of what was perceived at Nore as “republican radicalism” and that threatened to spread to vessels on North Sea, Mediterranean, and South African stations. Neither at the time, nor since did the *Armada* seem to be part of the same spectacle – until its time came too.

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAVE BREAKS OVER THE ARMADA’S DECKS

As the Napoleonic Wars progressed, the systemic crisis reached the gates of the Iberian Peninsula. Under the pretext of invading Portugal, Britain’s ally, in October 1807, the French army was allowed to cross Spanish territory, but almost immediately their presence was perceived as an invasion and stimulated the first signs of civil disobedience in Cartagena’s Navy and Artillery Department, where a first General Assembly of Government was created. When, in February 1808, Prime Minister Manuel Godoy instructed Cayetano Valdés, head of the port squadron, to sail to Toulon to muster alongside the French fleet, Valdés failed to carry out his orders, alleging “adverse winds”. The truth was that he and other commanders-in-chief were resisting, as far as they could, any suggestion of allying themselves with the invaders. Later, rumours spread about the task that awaited the squadron and, suspecting treason, a group of local inhabitants murdered the port commander, Francisco de Borja. Mirroring events in French ports, other maritime capitals like Cadiz and Ferrol witnessed patriotic excesses during popular uprisings, although very few were directed against any of the ports’ naval authorities. On the contrary, once the struggle for independence began in 1808, most of the officers led insurgent brigades, while the arsenals provided weapons and other resources, as well as marines and *maestranza* volunteers.

56. Cabantous, *La vergue et les fers*, pp. 175, 218.

57. Repulsions and regional prejudices already existed among the Grand Corps before the Revolution. See Acerra and Meyer, *Marines et Révolution*, p. 47. For a more complete study: Jacques Aman, *Les Officiers bleus dans la marine française au XVIIIe siècle* (Geneva, 1976).

58. Terry Crowdy, *French Warship Crews 1789–1805: From the French Revolution to Trafalgar* (Oxford, 2005), p. 42.

In May 1808, after another local board was established in Cadiz, in recognition of its authority the British suspended their blockade of the port and joined the cause by helping to secure the surrender of a French squadron anchored in the bay.⁵⁹ However, the French threat at sea was yet to be eradicated, and with the Spanish naval forces exhausted the seamen were anxious. The next month, when Valdés's squadron was at Mahon, a rebellion took place aboard his flagship *Reina Luisa*. The rebels demanded the discharge from their trial of an infantry corporal and four sailors accused of desertion and the murder of a local inhabitant. One of the instigators, a cabin boy, was arrested for an attempt on the commander's life during the mutiny. Although the crew in general expressed their "living desire to sacrifice for the good cause", one group of sailors, infantry, and gunners alleged they were incapable of resisting the French invaders. The captain therefore insisted on arresting all the "unruly" mutineers, men who were no more than "trouble-makers"; he described them as "haughty" and the "primary engines" of the disorder. However, after negotiations, the authorities allowed the rebels to leave the ship and make their way to Valencia.⁶⁰

On the other side of the Atlantic, news of the invasion of the metropolis caused excitement in the colonies. At that moment, for reasons of war economy, naval construction and maintenance had been practically abandoned, with only a few warships in auxiliary service for Peninsular resistance, for communications with the colonies, as merchant escorts or transports of provisions and soldiers, and for coastal watch operations.⁶¹ Meanwhile, in the port of Veracruz, orders to inspect incoming ships were tightened in order to intercept anyone who might be bringing inflammatory propaganda or seditious documents from France.⁶² So, when the schooner *Vaillant* arrived in July carrying papers addressed to New Spain's authorities on behalf of the French Foreign Minister, rumours spread that on board was a viceroy sent by the Duke de Berg, a lieutenant of Napoleon. The state of nervousness caused the port commander, Ciriaco Cevallos, to set a guard over the ship and forbid any communication with its men, who were later imprisoned. While all this was going on, dozens of seamen had formed angry groups in the harbour, believing their commander was showing support for the French. The rumours fed animosity and when the cry of "traitor!" went up a mob went to loot the

59. Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, IX, pp. 9–13.

60. Cartas sobre el motín en la fragata *Reina Luisa* y el envío de los presos José Albaladejo y Bernardo Lorenzo por motín y aviso de la deserción de otros tumultuosos, Mahón, Julio 7 de 1808, AMN, DH, ms. 2238, doc. 79, fos 289r–291v.

61. Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, IX, p. 22.

62. Christon I. Archer, "México en 1810. El fin del principio, el principio del fin", in Alicia Mayer (ed.), *México en tres momentos, 1810–1910–2010. Hacia la conmemoración del bicentenario de la Independencia y del centenario de la Revolución Mexicana. Retos y perspectivas*, 2 vols (Mexico City, 2007), I, pp. 26–28.

commander’s residence, succeeding in burning some of his belongings. Cevallos managed to escape to New Orleans, pursued by legal action. By the time he was acquitted in 1810, New Spain’s viceroy had been overthrown and insurgency in the province was well under way.⁶³

Thenceforth, during the 1810s, more than mere disciplinary fractures began to manifest themselves in Hispanic-American waters. They were influenced by the development of the struggles for emancipation in the viceroyalties of New Granada, Río de la Plata, Peru, and Mexico as well as the constitutionalist movement that was gaining strength in the metropolis. One of the first occurred on the frigate *Trinidad*. The ship was part of the squadron commanded by Dionisio Capaz, who was commissioned to transport 2,000 troops from Cadiz to Callao, where imperial forces were concentrated. In July 1818, after rounding Cape Horn with great difficulty, the ship left the convoy. Aboard were 200 men of the Cantabria regiment and infantry, led by four liberal Spanish officers, among them cavalry Captain Francisco Pelegrín, Sergeant Remigio Martines, and Second Lieutenant Manuel Abreu. The soldiers had been forced to embark on the *Trinidad* and now rebelled against the order to suppress the Chilean insurgents, considering it an arbitrary act on the part of the monarchy. In a radical act, the mutineers first murdered Captain Francisco Bandarán and other officers who remained loyal to the king, and then decided to surrender to the national government of Buenos Aires. There, the officers were offered promotions and the troops incorporated into the patriot army, while the seamen and ships were added to the recently formed republican navy.

By late March 1821, the frigates *Prueba* and *Venganza* – part of the *Armada del Mar del Sur* under Captain José Villegas – arrived at the port of Acapulco in Mexico, which was in the hands of the Trigarante forces commanded by Vicente Guerrero and the former royalist Agustín de Iturbide. A new confrontation took place that continued until October, when the garrison was recaptured by the insurgents. By then, the situation on board both ships was rather tense, as the men – the majority Peruvian and Chilean Creoles – were divided ideologically into openly liberal and conservative camps. In addition, recent promotions granted by the Peruvian viceroy had caused difficulties among the officers, only some of whom had been preferred. Therefore, when the Treaty of Córdoba in August ended the royal government in Mexico, the dissenting petty officers and seamen saw an opportunity to deliver their ships to the new republic. Confronted with this problem, the leaders who had stayed loyal decided to sail to Panama, which was still in the hands of royalists.

63. Vindicaciones de Ciriaco Ceballos, comandante del apostadero de Veracruz, por haber prohibido que sus subalternos se comunicaran con los tripulantes de la goleta francesa *la Vaillante*, AGN, IC, RA, Incidencias (060), vol. 30, fo. 1v, 1809, fo. 186v; Motín en Veracruz contra del Comandante del apostadero Ciriaco Ceballos, 1808, AGMAB 43.80; Archer, “México en 1810: el fin del principio”, pp. 26–28.

With the situation now under control, the frigates arrived in November, only to find that the port had already proclaimed its independence. There, another section of the crew, including six officers, mutinied and deserted. After a peace treaty was signed between the Crown and the republicans of Peru (February 1822), the rest of the loyal commanders, convinced that the cause was lost, set sail for Guayaquil, where they were joined by the corvette *Alejandro*. By May, however, all three vessels had surrendered to Peruvian government forces. Lack of supplies, social divisions among the men, the danger of another mutiny, and, as Ortiz Sotelo supposes, family connections of certain officers and crews with Callao and Lima were among the reasons that forced their decision. In exchange, the surrendering crews requested the payment of wages delayed since 1820; 100,000 pesos to be sent to Spain in recognition of independence; and promotion for any who wished to serve the emerging nation or repatriation for those who did not.⁶⁴

Thus depleted, in January 1824, in a last effort to sustain the struggle for Peru, the Spanish decided to send a naval aid expedition. A thousand seamen and soldiers departed from Cadiz aboard the *Asia*, a ship of the line, and the brig *Aquiles* commanded by Lieutenant General Roque Guruceta. When they arrived at Callao in September, the port, recently recaptured by royalists, was under siege by a fleet led by the Peruvian Martin Guisse. After helping to put an end to the blockade, Guruceta's forces left the port and headed for the open sea, joined along the way by the brigs *Pezuela* and *Constante*, in which a number of patriot seamen had been impressed. With them was the corvette *Victoria de Ica* and the *Clarrington*, a merchantman recently captured while selling weapons to the patriots.⁶⁵ Next, Guruceta sailed with the *Asia*, *Aquiles*, *Constante*, and *Clarrington* to the Philippines in search of supplies; of the rest, one group sailed to Spain and the other to Chiloé. In March 1825, the lieutenant's fleet was forced to land on the island of Guam, in the Marianas, for urgent repairs. There, some seamen and soldiers, among them Peruvians, Mexicans, Chileans, and Ecuadorians, mutinied, led by naval officer José Rodríguez, the marine infantryman Francisco Mena, helmsman Domingo Cartas, and two American ordinary seamen. The men complained of over-extended deployment, non-payment of wages, and scarcity of basics such as tobacco, thread, and soap.⁶⁶ The loyal officers resisted for a number

64. Ortiz Sotelo, *La Real Armada en el Pacífico*, pp. 377–380.

65. López Urrutia, *Historia de la Marina de Chile*, p. 226.

66. *Guía de Forasteros*, p. 1; Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, IX, pp. 307–311. See also Sumaria de la sublevación de la tripulación de la Escuadra del Pacífico al mando del Coronel Roque Guruceta, 1824, AGMAB 3625, C, fo. 2; Comunicaciones de Juan Villavicencio al comandante general del departamento de Cádiz referentes a conservación de la disciplina y cumplimiento de servicio por los oficiales y castigo a los desertores de los navíos *Asia* y *Aquiles*, 12 de enero de 1824, AMN 0530, Departamento de Cádiz, CG, vol. VIII, ms. 1558/025, fos 145r–146v; Relación de individuos y marinería que siguieron en los navíos *Asia* y *Aquiles* después del levantamiento y

of days, during which the captain suffered a head wound; but in the end they were disarmed and forced to disembark. After setting fire to the *Clarrington*, the mutineers from the *Asia* and *Constante* – approximately fifty men, including land- and seaborne officers, infantrymen, gunners, and seamen – forced Lieutenant José Martínez to set sail on a course for Acapulco, where they finally delivered the ships to the authorities (Figure 1). In exchange for the ship, the mutineers demanded their belated wages, the right to sail under the Mexican flag, and, for those who wished, the freedom to leave. For its part, the *Aquiles* with its mostly Chilean crew sailed to Valparaíso with the same purpose in mind.⁶⁷

At that point, along with the loss of *Armada* units by shipwreck, capture, or discharge, the “republican” mutinies represented the “deliverance” of the Spanish forces to a new-born order and the fracture of imperial power.

AN ERA OF MUTINY

War expansion introduced remarkable changes in the wooden world’s inhabitants, and confrontations over matters of authority, work, and discipline spread easily, generating a radical-collective antagonistic tendency.⁶⁸ Leaving the Dutch aside – who, for the greater part of the period, remained at the margins of direct military confrontation with other overseas powers – the French and British navies alone showed high levels of social unrest during the 1790s. In the first place were the thousands who protested between 1789–1793 in French ports (in Brest alone, 5,000 did so between 1790 and 1791)⁶⁹ and on more than seventy ships; they amounted to an estimated 7,000 mutineers over four years,⁷⁰ which is conceivably a conservative figure. For their part, the British began their uprisings with 10,000 men⁷¹ within a year and reached approximately 30,000 in one hundred vessels.⁷² With far fewer, the Spanish

su entrega a los insurgentes de Méjico, Madrid, 15 de febrero de 1826, AMN 1179, MM, NR 93/30, no. 002/6, fos 145r–146v.

67. José F. Pavia avisa su llegada a Vigo en la fragata mercante *Victoria*, remitiendo el diario de navegación de Quilca a Humatac, mandando el bergantín *Aquiles*, que allí se sublevó, como el *Asia* [...], 5 de marzo 1825, AGMAB 76.38, EI, cat. 3286. Also, Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, IX, pp. 312, 337.

68. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (New York, 1987), p. 155.

69. Acerra and Meyer, *Marines et Révolution*, pp. 122 and 124. Antoine-François Bertrand de Molleville, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l’histoire de la dernière année du règne de Louis XVI, roi de France*, 3 vols (Paris, 1797), I, pp. 261–263.

70. See appendix 5 in Moya Sordo, “Motines a bordo”, pp. 113–116.

71. Jeffrey D. Glasco, “We are a Neglected Set’, Masculinity, Mutiny, and Revolution in the Royal Navy of 1797” (Ph.D., University of Arizona, 2001), p. 18.

72. Niklas Frykman, “The Mutiny on the Hermione: Warfare, Revolution, and Treason in the Royal Navy”, *Journal of Social History*, 44:1 (2010), pp. 159–187, 161.

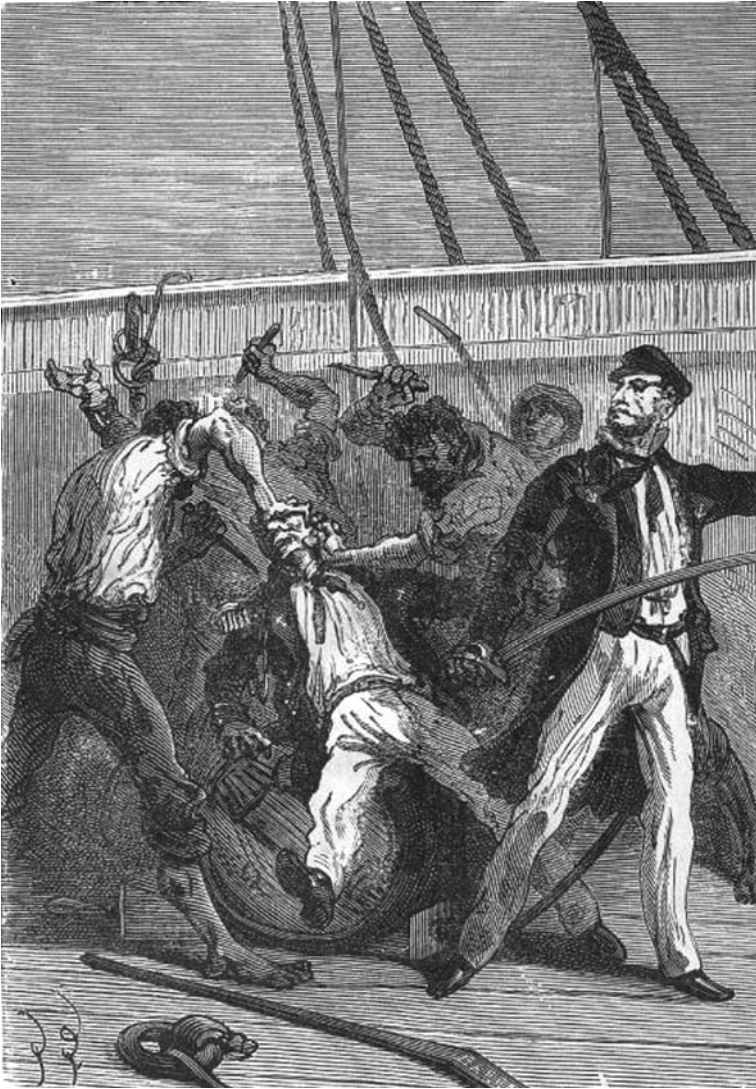


Figure 1. “Mutineers on board the *Constante*”, by Jules Férat, 1876. The mutinies on *Asia* and *Constante* inspired Jules Verne’s first novel, *Un drame au Mexique* (Paris, 1845). A revised version was published in 1876 with six illustrations by Férat.

Jules Verne, *The Mutineers: A Romance of Mexico* (*Un drame au Mexique*), London, 1876.

navy recorded no remotely similar numbers; thus, in comparison, it is barely worth speaking of the few hundred men who mutinied between the 1770s and the time of its war of independence. After that time, however, riots, although not simultaneous, were more frequent and certainly more extreme when

compared with the earlier Hispanic-American insurgencies. Considering the examples discussed, we may safely estimate that, between 1818 and 1825, roughly 2,000 or more rebels were active one way or another in the ships of the *Armada*.

Beyond differences in number and intensity, it should be borne in mind that although the fatigue of war and accumulation of material and emotional complaints were common everywhere, each movement emerged from a particular socio-political context. Undoubtedly, all were part of the same international process of warfare, but the level of unity and antagonism in each case was a response to its own inner stability. The reasons for the French naval mutinies included economic crisis, famine, new taxes – all of which affected the army, too, of course. As part of a generalized revolution, the mutineers tended to show an anti-monarchist spirit and class resentment later reinforced by an awakening of anti-republicanism. Unsurprisingly, then, they were radical at each stage.

But if in those days ideas of freedom, fraternity, and equality transcended frontiers, anti-monarchist policies were not accepted by all European powers, or by most of the populations they came from, for that matter. If some of the 1797 demonstrations resembled the French rejection of aristocratic leadership, the general status of British officers – not all of whom were noblemen – was never compromised, nor was confidence in their authority. The insurrections were not part of any civil war, nor did they spread through the ports or penetrate the arsenals – and certainly not their wider societies. All the same, when the first mutiny occurred at Spithead – an impressive event considering the numbers and level of organization – it did not escape suspicion. Various Sea Lords, including Richard Howe and Hugh Seymour, believed that it was all a conspiracy, while others perceived something “perfectly French” and were convinced that secret Jacobite minds were behind it.⁷³ In fact, the leaders of the first riot were simply naval ratings with no thoughts at all of declaring any revolutionary or republican ideas. The majority of the mutineers were aligned with the traditional structure and focused purely on improving their working conditions rather than destroying the command hierarchy. Furthermore, despite the presence of the minority of radical characters at Nore, there was no evidence of any hidden political mechanism, rather they embodied their own ideas arising from the British republican faction.⁷⁴

73. See Glasco, “We are a Neglected Set”, p. 31.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–209, 56–59. See also Nicholas A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), pp. 442–453; Ann Hawkins and Helen Watt, “Now is our Time, the Ship is Our Own, Huzza for the Red Flag”, *Mariner’s Mirror*, 93:2 (2007), pp. 156–179; Coats, “The Delegates”, in Coats and MacDougall, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, pp. 39–55; Steven Pfaff, Michael Hechter, and Katie E. Corcoran, “The Problem of Solidarity in Insurgent Collective Action: The Nore Mutiny of 1797”, *Social Science History*, 40:2 (2016), pp 247–270.

However, if the confrontation of classes and politicization of crews paralysed the French fleets, and the sense of deterioration of sailors' status and various injustices affecting them threatened the British navy's disciplinary foundation, nothing similar happened in the *Armada* during the 1790s. Certainly, the *Armada's* structure was just as hierarchical as that of any of its allies, especially the French, with an exclusively aristocratic officer corps. Indeed, just as in any other European navy, the discomforts of the Spanish crews became a cause for concern. Minister Javier de Salas pointed out that their treatment was simply "typical of their low status and never of their merits", they were maltreated by the authorities, and were guided by the "stick or lash", which "managed to degenerate them" as far as dignity was concerned. If that was so, not only was a latent state of anarchy to be expected on the Spanish decks, so too was a social revolution. But even though there had been concerns about the "state of the fleets" ever since early in the century, revealing the discontent was a continuous process that nevertheless left no records of uprisings on such a large scale.

All the same, the years leading up to the Spanish War of Independence were especially turbulent, as the movements in the Spanish ports were as popular as their French equivalents had been at the beginning of that country's revolution. But if local assemblies that assumed national sovereignty, such as the one in Cadiz in 1812, echoed some of the first liberal ideas, they had no immediate influence on the population. Until 1813, an internal struggle was conducted to expel the intruders, rather than to tear down the walls of the Royal Palace. Generally speaking, acrimonious feelings were not directed against officials of noble origin, for naval commanders and crews alike continued to be more united in resistance than divided. Even when authority was defied, as in the case of Valdés, the crews' demands and actions showed no trace of any sort of republicanism or radicalism. However, that began to change as the 1810s progressed and growing opposition in the Hispanic-American colonies was certainly fed by republicanism.

At that time, Spain's degraded maritime power mirrored the exhaustion of its monarchy. The *Estados Generales de la Armada* of the period hinted at it, although they represent the account only of "enabled" vessels in Cadiz, Ferrol, and Cartagena, where the principal concentrations of warships were gathered. For example, even in 1793, with Spain's naval forces at their zenith, of a total of 222 units only seventy-nine were ships of the line and fifty-four were frigates, of which barely six and twenty respectively were armed. Something similar was true of the smaller corvettes, sloops, and brigantines that completed the fleet, as only a few were armed. By the time war with England was renewed in 1795–1798, there were indeed more fully equipped vessels: 170 of 225. However, we can see that, once more, there was a reduction in 1803, when there were 117, though there followed a noticeable recuperation by the time of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, when there were 140. Subsequently, and principally during the Spanish war, there was a notorious

and abrupt decline in the number of operationally capable vessels, from 126 in 1808 to only forty-six in 1815.⁷⁵

During most of that period a considerable proportion of vessels were “unserviceable” and in various states of disablement, some being refitted, under repair, or even still on the slipway. With the Treasury dealing with bankruptcy and Spain’s participation in the naval arms race suspended, the situation could not have been more dramatic. Obsolete vessels like the *Conde de Regla*, an old ship of the line, even had to be used to supply firewood for the garrisons. An arsenal as important as Ferrol lay abandoned from 1810. At Ferrol, desperate conditions of unemployment and hunger led a crowd to attack Captain General José Vargas in his own home – after killing Vargas, the mob dragged his corpse through the streets.⁷⁶ As Ivan Valdéz-Bubnov points out, the production of new vessels was almost brought to a standstill, with only four new frigates launched between 1789 and 1814 – two in Spain and two in Havana – as well as a few smaller vessels.⁷⁷ By 1820, Spain deployed 44 vessels distributed around European seas, 38 in America, and 11 on other stations round the globe. Of those 93 units only 59 were armed and as few as 8 actually at sea. By 1822, the total had fallen to 72, of which 42 were serviceable, although the majority of those were small ships spread across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Mediterranean.⁷⁸

The same crisis caused a reduction in manpower. For the Spanish, an average of 60,000 seamen and arsenal workers were recruited per year from 1780–1800. For comparison, France managed around 70,000 while the figure for Britain increased noticeably from 99,000 in 1795 to approximately 123,000 in 1800.⁷⁹ The Spanish numbers subsequently decreased even more due to a hastiness to place the fleets on a war footing, along with the perennial problem of non-payment of wages, which only increased the desertion problem. The situation was desperate by the beginning of the Peninsular War, with only 36,669 sailors, pilots, fisherman, shipowners, and so on⁸⁰ registered in Spanish ports.⁸¹ Nor did the problem improve when the traditional system

75. “Relación de los buques de que se compone la Real Armada”, *Estado General de la Armada* (Madrid, 1789–1793, 1798–1805, 1810, 1815).

76. Fernández Duro, *Historia de la Armada*, IX, pp. 26, 54.

77. Ivan Valdéz-Bubnov, “Navíos para un imperio global. La construcción naval y la matrícula de mar en España, América y Filipinas durante el largo siglo XVIII (1670–1834)”, *Espacio Tiempo y Forma*, 32 (2019), p. 153.

78. *Estado General de la Armada* (1820, 1822). Since 1811, some years include other ports of the empire and more details of the state of the habilitated ships: if they were “travelling”, in commission, or assigned to a specific location.

79. See appendix 2 in Moya Sordo, “Motines a bordo”, p. 309. Statistics extracted principally from Manuel Burgos Madroñero, *Hombres de mar, pesca y embarcaciones en Andalucía. La Matrícula de mar en los siglos XVIII y XIX* (Seville, 2003), and Acerra and Meyer, *Marines et Révolution*.

80. Not including *maestranza* nor infantry.

81. *Estado General de la Armada* (1800, 1808). On the complexity of calculating an average from the lists, see José Gella Iturriga, *La Real Armada de 1808* (Madrid, 1974).

of recruitment (*matrícula*) was abolished in 1812, although attempts were made to restore it in 1817 and 1821.⁸²

Furthermore, and as we have seen, the operation of the naval machinery was directly affected by convulsions on land, and not only in the remote colonies. At the beginning of the Liberal Triennium (1820–1823), as troops were gathering in Cadiz waiting to leave on an expedition to suppress the uprisings in South America, insubordination began to spread over non-payment of wages, bad food, and poor conditions in quarters. As a result, around 1,500 men mutinied under the leadership of a liberal *hidalgo*, Colonel Rafael del Riego. The mutineers set out on a march through Andalusia with the intention of proclaiming the Constitution of 1812. The episode gives some idea of the difficulty of managing maritime personnel in such conditions, reminding us that many soldiers and sailors found themselves obliged to serve in the midst of a unique revolutionary process. The traditional complaints of all servicemen had become more grievous and pressing; resistance to authority had increased, which, in turn, brought the differences into sharper relief while more clearly defining the factions between conservatives and liberals, monarchists and republicans, Peninsular and American. In such a situation, even those most loyal to the Crown had no choice but to surrender, unable to overcome the will of a divergent majority, while the ship of empire remained holed below the waterline.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued that the naval mutinies of the 1790s were more than merely circumstantial expressions of discontent caused by accumulations of injustice and harsh conditions of service. Instead, they were a radical movement, an “Atlantic revolution” that grew from the progressive emergence of a common political ideology, namely republicanism. However, not everyone in the “Floating Republic” was so radical, not even at Nore. Nor was every uprising an “Atlantic” one, as they occurred in the Mediterranean as well as in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Although we may agree that global warfare and liberal ideologies influenced a new sense of identity among naval communities from the 1790s to 1820, we have seen that the roots of their various upheavals emerged from independent socio-political contexts. There was no uniformity in their dynamics, or in their styles of leadership and collectivism. They did not even quite share the same principles.

In the British mutinies of 1797, the majority of ratings at Spithead who refused to sail were driven by a wish to gain better labour conditions and respect for their trade, a motive seen again in later uprisings. In spite of a

82. Valdéz-Bubnov, “Navios para un imperio global”, p. 153.

certain political solidarity – although with no parallels with the class struggle in rival territories – with the main menace being the possibility of invasion, the uprisings were neither anti-monarchist, nor even entirely radical. The mutineers’ main concern was to restore their rights and position within an already well-established system.

Instead, although occurring at different times, the “revolutionary” French and the “republican” Spanish riots still shared common ground as parts of internal conflicts and the fracture of the political structures of their respective monarchies. In both cases, a combination of factors such as economic bankruptcy and socio-political instability united seamen’s insubordination with the dissatisfaction of their societies ashore, especially in the case of their land forces. Indeed, the unrest within the army created its own complications in the quelling of the unrest, a clear contrast with the British case, where riots were essentially maritime with practically no support from regiments ashore who, in fact, helped suppress the mutinies.

There were marked differences, too, in how the struggle was conducted, due to the level and type of political influence in each case. Thus there were “revolutionaries” whose mainspring was class warfare and who created a broad socio-political movement that they deployed against the hierarchy in power. Such “revolutionaries” characterized themselves by their persecution and eradication of aristocrats from the naval hierarchy in repudiation of monarchical representation. For their part, although sharing a distinctive class system of nobles and plebeians, “republican” riots did not rise from the lower ranks of marine society. Instead, their distinguishing feature was that they were led on both land and sea by officers of all ranks and varied origins. Some were Spaniards and some Creoles, of all classes including *hidalgos*. All showed liberal or anti-monarchical interests. The unique twist for the Spanish was that, as a result of the influence of republicanism and diverse bonds with the colonies among leaders and crews, they were driven to their diverse aims by extreme operational circumstances, particularly during military commissions to transport men for the purposes of war. In the circumstances, some saw opportunities in other territories to seek the conditions conducive to a better life and, given the weakness of monarchical power, political independence. Others, still loyal, wanted only the restitution of their rights as servicemen and to return to their homeland.

In retrospect, this chain of collective naval rebellions, united in a sequence of narratives at particular times and in particular contexts, formed parts of similar processes of socio-political change during the Age of Revolutions. Although discontent and social division were traditional within the “wooden world”, when those divisions were exposed to the pressures of continuous global military effort, the weight of exhaustion and burden increased antagonism among the various groups. Pressure to adapt to new circumstances strengthened collectivism and offered possibilities to undertake high-risk actions. The overarching revolutionary political-ideological transformation resulted in serious

disciplinary problems and an extraordinary wave of rebellions in the armed forces, testing the institutional capacities of the ancien régime powers. Choosing their moments, and with a shared longing for better labour terms and improvements to the conditions of their lives, the mutineers, from the docksides and the decks of the imperial fleets, combined forces and severed the ropes that bound the rigging of their traditional navies. Their impact on their institutions and their nations resonated; what they did symbolized a firm step forward taken by naval personnel on the path to modernity.