

BOOK REVIEW

Maggie Dwyer. *Soldiers in Revolt: Army Mutinies in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xii + 183 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$89.99. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0190876074.

Military mutinies are mostly illegal and may sometimes be punishable by death. Yet, soldiers across Africa and elsewhere still choose on occasion to revolt. This begs the question, why do soldiers take such risks? Maggie Dwyer's book *Soldiers in Revolt: Army Mutinies in Africa* compellingly unpacks this understudied puzzle within the field of Security Studies. She argues that military mutinies are not simply acts of indiscipline on the part of the soldiers involved. Rather, a military revolt is a way of communicating the mutineers' grievances to the military hierarchy or to the political authorities. Her book advances our understanding of the causes of military mutinies in two ways. First, it reconciles two existing explanations in the mutiny literature. While previous scholarship revolves around either material grievances or perceptions of injustice, Dwyer demonstrates that these two driving factors are often intertwined. Second, Dwyer's portrait of mutinies as a means of communication departs from earlier perspectives and forces us to think about the prevention of military revolts in new terms.

The book consists of nine chapters. It starts with a discussion of the existing scholarship on mutiny and offers in its early pages some important clarifications about the concepts of coups versus mutinies. The author then provides an overview of the data she collected on instances of mutiny in West and Central Africa from 1960 through 2014. While she does not provide much information about the dataset, she offers a list (country name and year of occurrence) of all the seventy-one cases documented, drawing on multiple sources including media reports, academic texts, biographies, intelligence reports, and interviews. The later chapters qualitatively examine cases of military revolt across three countries: Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Burkina Faso. The author concludes with her perspectives on the future of the phenomenon of military mutiny in Africa.

Dwyer's work highlights multiple noteworthy patterns of mutiny across West and Central Africa. One common pattern, consistent with our conventional understanding of mutinies, is that mutineers generally have grievances

related to their conditions of service. These are typically expressed in terms of material demands or complaints about the military leadership or the system itself. The book also shows that, while mutinies in this region tend to occur predominantly within army ranks as opposed to navies or air forces, there is no evidence to suggest that certain army units are more likely to mutiny than others. Also, most of the mutinies examined in the book occurred in capital cities, as only 20 percent of them took place in units based in rural areas. Some of the most common tactics employed by mutineers include gathering in public and discharging firearms, taking hostages, and controlling strategic locations and infrastructures.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the book is Dwyer's ability to draw attention to themes that are often overlooked in the study of military affairs. For instance, students of African militaries generally assume that, because they are less well-equipped than and not as well funded as their Western counterparts, African military personnel must be less committed to their service. The author challenges this assumption by showing that African soldiers too are proud servants of their countries. Thus, explaining the persistence of military revolts on the African continent requires us to move beyond dismissive arguments about the lack of commitment to professional service on the part of African soldiers.

Two other influential themes are examined in the book in relation to the occurrence of mutinies in African contexts. One is the role of peacekeeping deployments at home and abroad. The author argues that these operations, especially deployments abroad, enable soldiers to compare their conditions to those of other countries' troops and may thus generate dissatisfaction and new grievances. The importance of the civilian population as both an unintentional influencer and a victim of military mutinies is also given extensive consideration in the book. On one hand, civilian trends (e.g., democratization movements) may inspire mutineers in their decision to revolt, and civilian institutions (such as media) sometimes facilitate the mutineers' actions. On the other hand, civilians might be impacted by mutinies, as these events may produce damaging consequences, including casualties and fatalities, among civilians.

Although the author does not emphasize this point, the need to increase incentives among civilians to properly oversee the military seems to be a key takeaway of the book. If mutinies are indeed a way of expressing soldiers' grievances to government authorities, as Dwyer argues, they should only occur when and where societies offer soldiers no other credible channels for the confidential expression of their grievances. Subsequently, reducing the risks of mutinies would require civilian officials, especially those in the legislative branch of government, to proactively engage in the oversight of military affairs.

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