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Braithwaite, John and D'Costa, Bina. Cascades of Violence: War, Crime and Peacebuilding Across South Asia. Canberra: The Australian National University, 2018.

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Using a method that they call a contemporary inductive approach, Braithwaite and D’Costa examine the nature of human violence—which precedes the existence of civil societies and nation states. They assert that empires have historically provided great geographical space and long periods of peace but that “when empires break up, violence cascades” (p. 2). The authors’ inductive method has yielded a framework that supports the metaphor of violence as a cascade. The notion of the image of a cascade (like a waterfall) makes it manageable for readers to follow the flow of discussion across the 12 chapters comprising this volume. The use of cascade also prevents the readers from perceiving the phenomenon of violence as a single or bounded entity.

What makes *Cascades of Violence* phenomenal in its examination of violence is the work’s combination of political and criminological theory in its analytical approach. The work also reminds readers of significant historical antecedents that shape the authors’ proposed “fabric of prevention” (p. 5), a framework meant to prevent violence. The authors recap this point in Chapter 10, where scholars apply the cascade framework to arrive at a “holistic narrative” of how violence spreads—or cascades—“within and between societies” (p. 451). The authors also assert that to understand and prevent violence, as argued in Chapter 11, Gandhian peace politics is not enough. Scholars and theorists must account for security reforms, without which conflict may become militarized, thus, cascading further violence, rendering those involved criminally liable.

Cascades of Violence implies that promoting peace and nonviolence requires attending to how violence can cause other forms of violence such as militarization, domination, and crimes. Chapter 4 addresses the historians who often ignore how crimes and wars propagate each other.¹ Crimes can lead to a war and vice versa. Assassinations, ethnic riots, murder, and rape are crimes often “coded as sparking armed conflict” (p. 155). As reiterated in Chapter 8, which tackles the Sri Lankan experience of the war-crime scale, “crime prevention is also war prevention.”

Braithwaite and D’Costa note how “subnational and transnational forces and interactions between macro, global and local cleavages” (p. 452) have entangled contemporary wars. *Cascades of Violence* works around these cleavages to test Ten Propositions “against the very worst of conflicts in South Asia” (p. 9) and its peripheries, which include Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Myanmar (Chapter 9). Chapter 3 presents Propositions 1-5 for a better understanding of the micro-macro dimensions of *Cascades of Violence*. Contemporary conflicts in Libya, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes region of Africa serve as a preview of Parts II and III of the text, in which the South Asian cases are extensively discussed. Chapter 4 canvasses Propositions 6-10, covering the Cascade of Domination, “the most central cascade in the book.” Indeed, Chapter 4 brings attention to an element barely recognized in the phenomenon of violence—the “cascades of bodies” due to displacement and replacement of their status as refugees and when rapes are no longer considered “shameful and [become] excusable.” Aptly titled “[Recognizing] Cascades in India and Kashmir,” Chapter 5 proposes a policy framed by “reconciling a multiplicity of cascades” to avoid policy miscalculations due to the “undercounting of cascades” (p. 179).

Informed readers are familiar with India’s partition and how it cascaded into the intractability of the Kashmir problem.² Chapter 6 revisits Pakistan, whose statehood was an offshoot of India’s partition, though it “remains in a state of turmoil.” Braithwaite and D’Costa

frame that turmoil in the ‘*mullah*–military nexus’ that pervades conflicts in Pakistan. In this way, militarization is also a cascade phenomenon—for it “imbues other institutions with a military character” (p. 320). This includes Bangladesh, which Pakistan lost due to its “[militarized] competition with India” (p. 334). Chapter 7 looks at the military-business nexus in Bangladesh and the macro-micro cascades phenomenon of a “qualitatively different character of militarization.” Here, sexual violence is a strategy, revenge is excusable, and insurgents “morph into gangs of [organized] criminals” (p. 321). Military and money politics in Bangladesh would cascade violence back to India and would have a spillover effects in Myanmar, as detailed in Chapter 9.

Braithwaite and D’Costa realize that their propositions are “interwoven with an intricacy and recursiveness that are not easily captured by focusing on particular arrows that connect one proposition to another” (p. 456). For instance, refugees are a creation of war. Recursively speaking, however, refugees also ‘ignite war.’ Democracy may spell equality, but it can also cause another form of violence—domination (p. 487). While chapter 10 provides a stabilizing spirit and presents an outline on deterring cascades of violence for peace advocates, Chapter 11 probes this outline in detail.

Chapter 11 begins with the premise of the cascade of violence and further illustrates the power of its cascading effect by extending it to other phenomena. As violence spreads, nonviolence attains the same cascading effect as violence—it is ‘transnationally contagious’ (p. 487). For instance, countries with restrictions on nonviolent resistance invite the likelihood of peace campaigns abroad on behalf of the oppressed. Moreover, leaders tend to be “conservative” in launching violence but “assertive in promoting cascades of nonviolence” (p. 488)—though when states are humiliated, conflicts are ignited. And more instructively than pro-democracy groups imagine, the ‘domination of democracy’ fuels conflicts. For example, “Gunboat diplomacy” veiled the narrative of humiliation among Islamic nations and failed to see the nexus of ‘humiliation-disgrace and bin Laden’s holy war against the USA” (p. 491). Democracy building in countries that have been devastated by conflicts can be equally devastating. Thus, Braithwaite and D’Costa revise their 5th proposition, saying: “Democracy can be a driver of domination” because it “enrolls political parties that intimidate voters and opponents.” In this situation, they appeal to peacemakers to become “model mongers” (p. 535) who attend to the “hurts and grievances of local people.”

Braithwaite and D’Costa bookend *Cascades of Violence* with a recapitulation of the cascade framework and its bearing on the Ten Propositions. Part III of the work contains three chapters. For theoretically or conceptually oriented readers, Chapter 10 is a revitalizing turn. After all, facts on violence can be draining and deafening when listening to calls to end it. Likewise, the force of any cascade can sweep away or drown one’s attention. Braithwaite and D’Costa neither drain nor drown the readers. They want to engage readers in a “discursive spirit” that neither “confirms nor refutes their propositions.” This is because nothing seems clear in the face of the empirical ground on which the authors tested the Ten Propositions.

Braithwaite and D’Costa acknowledge their own limitations as scholars and respect the shortcomings of fellow scholars or peace advocates. Their discursive and recursive approach makes *Cascade of Violence* a virtual manual on cascades of violence and nonviolence. The last chapter of this volume makes explicit the proposition not only that violence begets violence but that it can also beget nonviolence, which can also beget violence. This may sound complex, but Braithwaite and D’Costa manage to maintain it in their simple and iterative style of discussion.

Cascade of Violence does not point a straight line between violence and nonviolence because to do so is to paralyze one's ability to analyze.

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Notes

¹ As pointed out in the opening chapter, writings on war have moved to the 'criminalization of the state,' while the economy has become a breeding ground for criminal activities by both state and nonstate actors.

² The Kashmir problem is a 70-year old dispute between Pakistan and India. The outcome of India and Pakistan's partition their following independence from British colonial rule in 1947, Kashmir acceded to Hindu India. Pakistan has maintained that the predominantly Muslim Kashmir region belongs to them.