

Cascades of Violence: War, Crime and Peacebuilding Across South Asia. By John Braithwaite and Bina D'Costa. Canberra: ANU Press, 2018.

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How does violence cascade and how does a better understanding of this help us to prevent or contain such cascades? Merging perspectives from international relations, criminological and political theory, Braithwaite and D'Costa present an account of war and crime as cascade phenomena. Published as part of Australian National University's Peacebuilding Compared, a 25-year project aimed at sustainable peacebuilding, this book embraces the complexity of cascades involving crime, war, and state violence, in an ambitious effort to revitalize a global peacebuilding agenda that is suffering increasing criticism and internal disillusionment. The book itself combines a decade of rich interview data from across South Asia (and beyond) with historical analyses of violent and nonviolent episodes around the world, from the Great Wars of the twentieth century to the Gulf Wars and finally to the multiscalar conflicts across South Asia over the last half century. Using a cascade analysis—referencing Gladwell's (2000) *Tipping Point* and Sikkink's (2011) *The Justice Cascade* among others—the authors formulate 10 inductively generated propositions that, while falling short of culminating in a simple theory, offer a compelling, complex, and nonlinear explanation of the dynamics of violence and nonviolence across South Asia and beyond.

The book is presented in three parts, each of which develops the authors' cascade propositions in distinct directions. Part I uses cascades to explain three large-scale conflicts outside of South Asia over the past century: the Balkan wars leading to World War I; World War I as a cascade to World War II; and the cascade of wars across Africa in the 1990s. In Part II, we are taken to more closely examine cascades of violence across eight South Asian countries and their borders: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are presented in separate chapters, whereas a fifth chapter considers the “peripheral” countries of Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Afghanistan. Finally, Part III revisits and refines the cascade propositions, before progressing to suggest ways forward for a peacebuilding and preventative diplomacy agenda that cascades nonviolence. Although as a whole the book is well-organized and instructive, it need not be studied chapter-by-chapter. Part I, for example, may best speak to political theorists and international relations scholars, while those interested in public policy and

peacebuilding praxis may benefit more from a close reading of Part III and a more limited engagement with some of the preliminary material. Individual chapters within Part II will be of interest to regional and country enthusiasts and peace and conflict specialists. Interdisciplinary and interscalar perspectives weave throughout the book, providing opportunities to engage with known subject matter from new vantages.

This intention to highlight the complexities of social forces from the local to the global and suggest complex and adaptive solutions to crime and violence (perpetrated by the individual or the state) translates well for a sociolegal audience. It may be of special interest to those working within contexts where broader violence and social cleavages compound to undermine the efficacy of justice institutions, with the crime-war-crime cascades in Sri Lanka and Myanmar of particular note. The specific correlations that are identified among poverty, inequality, crime, and violence will be familiar to criminologists, whereas the model of *positive peace* as “peace with justice” (487) that the authors advocate may resonate well with those engaging from a human rights perspective. The inclusion of a diverse range of perspectives through interviews with both elite stakeholders (such as state officials and intelligence agencies) through to voices from civil society, women’s rights activists, youth, and marginal communities is indicative of the authors’ commitment to including multiple vantages to war and peacebuilding, particularly those whose expertise and experience have previously been overlooked. Ultimately, the cascade propositions themselves provide concrete yet flexible analytical guideposts that may prove far more satisfactory than such grand theories as the democratic peace and institution building (including that of law) that have come before.

This book adds significantly to the literature on conflict in South Asia as well as to global peacebuilding scholarship, which has suffered from its predilection toward parsimonious theories as well as the questionable success rate of liberal peacebuilding interventions. In advancing an agenda of cascading nonviolence, the authors steer clear of grand theory, favoring cautious, evidence-based, and contextually adapted strategies instead. For this reason, it may appeal to many critics of Western-led peacebuilding as well as those from within its ranks. Yet, there are also times when more complexity could be desired, and perhaps a tempering of the belief in local diplomacy and governance reform to comprehensively address drivers of violence and crime. Although the authors are extremely attentive to local-national-global scales, they largely ignore the role of private corporate actors (aside from private armed organizations) across these scales. The authors do touch upon corporate involvement in predatory development and

resource-grabbing within the case studies. Yet, in recommending strategies to cascade nonviolence through poverty and inequality reduction, they do not consider evidence that neoliberal “good governance” does not in itself temper rising inequality (Picketty 2014). Some readers—those who point not only to colonization and irresponsible decolonization, but to globalized neoliberal capitalist markets as fundamental drivers of global inequality—may be left pondering the limitations of peacebuilding (even as remodeled by the authors) in dismantling systems of domination and inequality. Here, a political economy analysis may have been beneficial, considering the integral role of both state and market actors, particularly multinational corporations and global financial giants, in fueling inequalities at local, national, and international levels.

This is an ambitious book, and the scope and complexity of the data it presents is testament to the overall potential of the Peacebuilding Compared project. There are moments where the general propositions can become lost in the detail, and perhaps the employment of lists or charts (as used at the end of the chapter on India) would assist the reader to engage deeply with the case-specific material while retaining an eye to the general propositions. Although the authors understandably “decided it would be tedious. . . to construct the narrative of each country case under the list of 10 propositions” (401), perhaps some middle ground would be useful. Rather than requiring constant page-turning to Appendix summaries, turning the rich case studies into more user-friendly resources might be achieved through the inclusion of summary tables that link relevant cascade propositions to each case at strategic points in the narrative. And although the breadth of this book is remarkable, given the authors do not expect to quantitatively analyze their data until closer to the project’s end-date, perhaps fewer illustrative examples per country case or proposition would have sufficed and enabled even deeper probing and explanation to the reader.

In sum, Braithwaite and D’Costa’s *Cascades of Violence* is a unique and refreshing addition to peacebuilding literature and the broader social sciences. It is best read in hard copy, allowing the reader to move easily between the opening propositions, the individual cases, the interim evaluations of Chapter 10, and the final Appendix. It manages to remain disciplined in its vision for peace despite the lure of a utopian agenda. Their suggestion for increased scholarly engagement through “open-source preventative diplomacy” (571) is one of the reasons that this book has been published somewhat pre-emptively, highlighting the potential for the academy to apply its resources in more unconventional ways to the practice of war prevention. For those interested in the law-

society nexus, it challenges us to incorporate greater complexity and nonlinearity into our understanding of how broader societal forces interact to deter or cascade crime, war, and peace. Ultimately, this book goes a long way to building an evidence base that can inform those who do value peacebuilding to do it better, and perhaps persuade those who are critical of the peacebuilding agenda to concede its potential. How the authors refine the cascade propositions over the following decade will be readily anticipated.

References

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- Picketty, Thomas (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
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The Politics of Love in Myanmar: LGBT Mobilization and Human Rights as a Way of Life. By Lynette Chua. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

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Human rights violations in Myanmar, formerly Burma, have been globally scrutinized, including imprisonment of state political opponents, systemic rape of ethnic minorities, unlawful capture and killing, and forced labor and relocation (253). With a history entrenched in violence and suppression, even speaking of human rights was unlawful until the political reformation of 2011 relaxed some social control (237). Additionally, religious beliefs paint lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people as immoral and eternally damned (Christianity) or embodying punishment for bad karma in past lives (seen in Burmese Buddhism) (280). Discrimination is upheld in legal institutions (e.g., the criminalization of same-sex sexual relations), by employers and educators, and cultural norms and behaviors such as frequent bullying and sexual assault (280). This social disgust has been internalized to produced self-hatred, fear, and shame; the LGBT human rights movement was tasked with