POLITICAL THEORY

Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age.
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Modern Western political thought privileges two of the three elements of the French revolutionary slogan *liberté, égalité, fraternité.* The last of these—fraternity—has played a relatively minor role in debates in political theory or political science. To the extent that practitioners of comparative politics have understood "ethnic politics," it seems as if ethnicity, when not understood in terms of blood and kin, is a consequence of colonial borders or the machinations of politicians. Shruti Kapila's *Violent Fraternity* urges political theorists and intellectual historians as well as empirical political scientists to take ideas seriously (p. 3), particularly ideas about fraternity and the place of political violence in them. Strikingly, these ideas about fraternity, violence, and sovereign power are not the familiar European ones from Schmitt, Arendt, Foucault, or Agamben. They are drawn from what Kapila labels "the Indian Age" (p. 4), roughly the first half of the twentieth century in late colonial India. For Kapila, this was a fertile period in modern intellectual history in which anticolonial thinkers posed and resolved problems of (popular) sovereignty outside the realm of colonial liberalism. Insofar as her protagonists acted simultaneously in Indian and world politics, Kapila pays close attention to vernacular idioms and contexts as well as the global implications of words and deeds.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each focused on a key thinker in the Indian Age. She starts with B. G. Tilak, a forgotten figure of modern Indian history today but the most popular politician of his day. When the British accused Tilak of sedition for supporting bomb-throwing youth, Tilak did not defend himself but critiqued the imperial regime's liberal expectations of loyal and peaceful subjecthood. For Tilak, the bomb produced a new kind of subject in British India, whose youthful and rebellious actions in the public sphere gave Indians power over the life and death of colonial officials. This redefinition of sovereignty from the colonial state to members of the colonized society came to be deterritorialized by the global revolutionary Ghadar movement led by Lala Hardyal, the subject of the second chapter. The next two chapters dwell on the antagonistic duo of V. D. Savarkar and M. K. Gandhi, the former committed to a futuristic idea of fraternity among the colonized, namely, Hindutva or Hindu nationalism; and the latter famously committed to nonviolence or *ahimsa* by which the deep, abiding structural violence of Hindu society could be turned inward by a new truth-seeking, anticolonial self.

The last three chapters of the book build on the arc traced from Tilak to Gandhi in imagining self and sovereignty in late colonial India. These chapters take readers to a dénouement of the drama of the independence and partition of British India. Kapila reminds us that "Hindus" and "Muslims" did not simply exist *a priori*, nor were they created *ex nihilo* by the colonial state. Instead, colonial subjects in British India, as the locus of sovereignty, became increasingly embroiled in a civil war or, in Tilak's terms, a fratricidal conflict that mirrored the epic lore of the Mahabharata. For their own reasons, B. R. Ambedkar, Muhammed Iqbal, and Sardar Patel, the three thinkers that dominate the latter half of the book, articulated strong arguments for partitioning the "violent fraternity" of late colonial India into two sovereign polities. For Iqbal, a modern Muslim nation in South Asia was, above all, a radical idea to reinvigorate the political selfhood of Muslims in British India. For Ambedkar, Pakistan was a legal and practical necessity so that Hindus, on their part, could move on with the difficult business of producing a republican polity out of disparate castes arranged hierarchically. Ultimately, however, it fell on India's first home minister Sardar Patel to oversee the endgame of decolonization during which kin turned into foes and resolved to live apart in future. Kapila is, to my mind, the first scholar to characterize the bloody partition of India as a "civil war" (pp. 229–71) in which "the people," as bearers of sovereignty, were rent asunder and intimate antagonisms took over. The communitas of modern nations have often emerged out of the embers of bloody conflict between intimates, whether neighbors or kinsmen (see, e.g., Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 2006*)*, and India and Pakistan ought to be seen as no different in this regard.

Kapila belongs to a new generation of global intellectual historians who seek to showcase the power of ideas in politics worldwide, not merely in Western Europe or North America (see Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History*, 2013). She also draws inspiration from the recent work of historians of the British Empire, C. A. Bayly and David Armitage, whose intellectual genealogies of colonial liberalism and civil war respectively inform the methodology of this book. Situating political ideas and texts in their contexts, Kapila makes surprising connections and parallels across time and space. There is a distinctive comparative method at work in this book: The ideas of Tilak, Savarkar or Iqbal are not presented as simply derivative of better-known European thinkers, they are also not so mired in the minutiae of Indian social and political histories that they cannot be extricated as *ideas* to be compared, contrasted, or understood genealogically. As such, Kapila's central claim is striking: The conundrums posed by popular sovereignty

at the start of the last century in British India require us to venture beyond the confines of liberal political thought into a more uncertain terrain of politics defined by both antagonisms and intimacies.

Late-colonial Indian thinkers had little choice but to grapple with these conundrums. In revisiting their agonistic struggles today, we cannot avoid thinking of our own populist age. What is often viewed as a crisis of democracies is not easily reducible to a new politics of representation or a disgust for professional politicians. If Kapila is correct, the sovereignty exercised by the "people" contains political possibilities that lie outside the well-defined terrain of liberalism and socialism. Violent fraternities exist today as much in India as in the United States and the European Union. Political violence directed at internal and external enemies, whether in symbolic or physical forms, is on the rise. Long-established institutions as much as old certitudes are called into question with increasing vehemence. At the same time, microcollectives are being stitched together digitally into new fraternities that claim the mantle of "the people" in democratic societies. When these newly invigorated nations, often majoritarian and illiberal, spring into life and violently lay claim to the sovereignty of the state, it is hard not to heed the main lesson of Kapila's book: We need to look beyond the liberal West to understand other political and linguistic worlds, especially the ideas buried within them. But when we do so, we may need to rethink democratic politics as a less orderly, even violent, arena in which the lines between friends and foes are blurred. For a country that has hardly contributed to the study of civil war, old or new, India seems remarkably fertile ground for thinking about violent fraternities and, in turn, democracy beyond liberalism.