[*Expositions* 15.1 (2021) 69–76] *Expositions* (online) ISSN: 1747–5376

Frazer, Elizabeth, and Kimberly Hutchings. *Violence and Political Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020. 224 pages. $22.95 (paper). ISBN: 978–1–509–53672–6.

Contemporary political theorist Sheldon Wolin wrote of political theory that it is "a sum of judgments, shaped by the theorist's judgment of what matters, and embodying a series of discriminations about where one province begins and another leaves off."[1] This description of what political theory entails is especially apt for a book such as *Violence and Political Theory*, which in an economical fashion seeks to selectively survey, taxonomize, and evaluate the treatment of violence and politics across centuries of political thought. Undaunted by this challenge, authors Frazer and Hutchings clarify from the outset that this undertaking is not meant to be exhaustive, and that even the treatment of a given thinker might "not always do justice to the broader political theory" (7) on offer. The justice to be done, instead, pertains to the subject matter at hand: the relationship between violence and politics, and the variegated theoretical treatment thereof. To this end, Frazer and Hutchings have offered us, if not a mosaic, then at least a bricolage.

From Niccolò Machiavelli to Jacques Derrida to Elaine Scarry, the twenty-six thinkers analyzed are creatively organized and juxtaposed. Apart from Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, all early modern theorists, the thinkers treated in this compendium made their mark in either the 19th or 20th Centuries. Grouped in eight chapters with capacious yet concise titles such as "Politics and Revolutionary Violence," "Politics and State Violence," and "Politics and the Transformation of Man," the synopsized thinkers and their ideas are situated in fruitful dialogue with each other, circumscribed by edifying introductory and concluding sections. Beyond mere curation, the authors engage critically with the arguments proffered in the relevant texts with an eye towards expounding their own political theory of violence. Their own theorizing, in turn, flows from examining how the selected thinkers produce and justify the conceptual distinctions made between violence and politics.

Frazer's and Hutchings's examination shows how drawing conceptual boundaries between violence and politics inevitably runs into difficulty. The authors claim that "such settlements are inherently unstable and full of tensions" (1). They argue further that these tensions give rise to taxonomical evasions by the theorists in question whenever they attempt to settle these conceptual questions. From their surveying of the literature, it "seems that the framing of violence in political theory necessarily involves slippage between violence and something else" (6). Frazer and

Hutchings argue that in these "slippages," thinkers move from attending to actual practices of violence and the conditions that give rise to them (that is, the *politics* of violence), to the justificatory structures that divert attention elsewhere. It is to these evasions, and what our authors claim they reveal, that we now turn.

In the taxonomy crafted by Frazer and Hutchings, distinct legitimation structures underpin the theoretical discourses on violence and politics. These justificatory structures differ depending on the thinker, but there are two predominant categories in which these diverse theoretical approaches can be thoughtfully positioned and juxtaposed. One category of justificatory evasions involves instrumental or consequentialist approaches. In these, violence is justified as the means to some political end or set of ends. Instead of focusing on the violence itself, attention shifts to the putative ends that these theorists argue justify the violence. For some theorists, these ends relate to overthrowing a tyrannical or colonizing state; to others, it is the very order and stability of the state that requires violence. The second predominate category focuses on questioning when and whether violence is of a virtuous or vicious character (and is thereby justifiable or not). Once again, the normative function is to divert attention from actual violence to the virtue or vice that either justifies or condemns it. These are certainly helpful analytical categories, and the book is replete with salient examples and distinctions drawn within them. The structural integrity of their taxonomy becomes suspect, however, as Frazer and Hutchings further complicate their own organizational schema.

The authors note that, while many evasive strategies fall into the categories of consequentialist or virtue justifications, other strategies do not seem to fit neatly into either class. For example, when instrumental reasoning fails due to the uncertainty inherent in predicting outcomes, some theorists turn to construing violence as inextricable from or necessary to politics. On the other hand, there are theorists who employ strategies to *depoliticize* violence. Frazer and Hutchings further argue that justificatory strategies are "often heavily dependent on various kinds of analogical and metaphorical reasoning and on the affective work of aesthetic categories," especially involving "tropes of war and gender" (5–6). Moreover, not only do these "slippages between accounts of political violence and discourses on war and gender do a great deal of legitimating work, they are also key to political theorists' failure to engage fully with conditions and practices of violence" (6). It is unclear, however, if or how the "key" of gender and war tropes unlocks each theoretical failure. Indeed, the authors themselves indicate that these justificatory

strategies, this gendering of language, and this aestheticization of violence often overlap. This initial lack of clarity is never subsequently resolved, and it remains a question how these tropes function distinctly from the manifold other theoretical patterns and tendencies used to evade confrontation with the reality of violence. What is much clearer in Frazer's and Hutchings's synoptic treatment is how the causes, effects, and relations of political violence have been consistently (but distinctly) underdeveloped within political theory. In this respect, their critique is both revelatory and useful in rethinking how we understand political violence.

At a meta-level, *Violence and Political Theory* allows its readers to consider how political violence is theorized across a spectrum of political thought. In isolating and categorizing these concerns, the authors give the reader a sense of the patterns of evasion that have been developed and the omissions that recur. Along the way, Frazer and Hutchings also offer their readers sharp revelations and adept distillations that do not necessarily pertain to justificatory strategies alone. Their appraisal of Hannah Arendt's theoretical offerings on violence provides a representative example. In what follows, Frazer and Hutching elucidate how violence is situated within Arendtian categories:

> Violence itself, in the context of politics, is ruled by means-end reasoning. Political actors assume that, like the making of an object, the use of certain tools will bring about a particular outcome. The problem with violence, in contrast to that with fabrication, is that the end to which violence is directed is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the means it justifies. All human action, including political action, is unpredictable, but to this unpredictability violence brings a significant additional element of arbitrariness. It might "pay," but it pays indiscriminately. The most probable change it will bring about is a change to a more violent world. To the extent that the world becomes more violent, the possibilities for politics are reduced and corrupted. (77–78)

Here, Frazer and Hutchings place Arendt's insights into violence in the context of her broader political theory. In addition to juxtaposing Arendt's understanding of violence against her conception of power and action, which for Arendt are the concepts *par excellence* for understanding "the political," the authors also compare violence to fabrication. This begins to lay

the groundwork for their subsequent claim in the chapter that, for Arendt, "the category of violence hovers somewhere between the categories of work and action" (81). For scholars and students of Arendt's political theory, this is a valuable intervention, as it puts into conversation Arendtian terms and categories from both *On Violence* and *The Human Condition*. If Arendt's category of work applies to fabrication, where with an image in our minds we can then make the world, and action is the spontaneous, generative activity that distinguishes human beings from each other and shapes the stories that retrospectively define them, violence "hovers" yet doesn't land on either conceptual territory. Violence might well seduce us into thinking we can (re)make the world with it, as with fabrication, or become memorialized heroically through it, as with political action. Consequently, violence often destroys the very ends it was intended to serve, brought about by a blurring of conceptual lines.

The above analysis is but one of many such examples that Frazer and Hutchings provide readers throughout the book. It is in their erudite ability to distill and comparatively analyze complex political theories that permits, for instance, a treatment of Marx and Engels spanning fewer than four pages to be worthwhile. This lucidity and insight, however, is interrupted at times by less effective offerings. Frazer's and Hutchings's analytical distillations occasionally run into problems when coupled with arguments made on behalf of their own theory of political violence. This is most often the case regarding the asserted "key" of analyzing how gender and war tropes function affectively and persuasively. For example, the authors write about John Locke that: "the exemplary kind of violence at the heart of Locke's justificatory political philosophy is that of the marauder, of the beast who threatens life in the wilderness, and of the thieves and burglars who threaten security and property. The threat coming from the tyrant is construed as analogous to the threat that emanates from these categories" (34). This is an astute observation, and well and good as far as it goes. Corresponding observations about George Sorel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir are subsequently made in short succession, culminating in the following argument that binds them all together:

> The problems and paradoxes involved in arguments that justify violence, whether in relation to outcomes, rights, necessity, or virtue, are addressed through the thinkers' uses of rhetorical strategies and aesthetic categories so as to secure their conceptual and normative ground. We know that tyrannical violence is beastly, and

> parliamentary politics dishonest; hence revolutionary violence, as the opposite to these qualities, must be normatively preferable. We know that proletarian violence is masculine and socialist political parties are effeminate; so we already know which form of action is better. (36)

The above terms are claimed by Frazer and Hutchings to be intrinsically gendered and operating affectively as a form of metaphorical reasoning; that is, in lieu of argument, the gendered terminology itself functions rhetorically as a form of persuasion. And yet, there are no ensuing reasons proffered to support these claims; rather, the use of "we know" is doing the analytical work. Even assuming that "we know" that proletarian violence is gendered as masculine and socialist political parties as effeminate (and that the masculine is therefore favored), in what way does this relate to "beastly" tyranny and "dishonest" politics? Might not "beastly" be construed as masculine, and therefore favored? Frazer and Hutchings subsequently invoke mythic metaphors of heroically killing dragons as part of the aestheticized, problematic metaphorical language at work. Is it "killing the beast," then, that is masculine and therefore favored? Is this functioning rhetorically as both a war trope and a gender trope, and if so, is there more affective work done by the gender or war metaphor? Is dishonesty inherently gendered as feminine? What are the claims here, precisely?

Other examples speak less to the impediment of analytical vagueness than to inconsistency. For instance, when the authors analyze the normative appeal to "sacrifice," this virtue is understood in one context as feminine, as with Gandhi (140), but when analyzing Carl Schmitt, sacrifice is construed as the heroic, masculine virtue that "feminised" liberals lack (66). Further, while Gandhi does indeed present sacrifice as a virtue, Schmitt does not even use this term, let alone in an explicitly gendered manner; neither does Schmitt refer to gender in other contexts. Rather, the authors inscribe into his theory the principle of sacrifice based upon the "friend-enemy distinction" he develops, and then construe this principle as related to gender. In these and other such instances, it seems to be the authors themselves who reify gender and fix the meaning of disparately used (or merely implied) terms for their own rhetorical and persuasive purposes.

It is certainly true and important to note that language often operates to instantiate, affirm, and reinforce patriarchal (and other oppressive) structures of power. It is also undoubtedly the case that many of the thinkers under examination, and certainly the times in which they wrote, were

imbued with patriarchal biases. However, this does not mean, necessarily, that the language used in the expounding of a given political theory functions chiefly (if at all) by way of taking advantage of these gendered biases. This claim would have to be demonstrated, rather than extrapolated. Instead, support for this through line of analysis is given short shrift. Had the authors posited a narrower claim and highlighted as noteworthy the inclusion of gender and war tropes within the plethora of justificatory rhetorical moves made, this would have enriched rather than detracted from the analysis. It is worth noting a few other claims by the authors that would have been better suited to the editorial chopping block; moreover, their inclusion might also explain a correspondingly conspicuous omission.

Frazer and Hutchings assert that, in their view, "feminist reflections on political violence, through debates on pacifism and war, push to its limits the political theory repertoire for thinking about the relation between politics and violence" (175). One might hope that this strong assertion would be accompanied by equally strong arguments to support it. Instead, it is appended with yet a further bold, revealing claim. The authors state that, "Even more radical than Marxist, anarchist, and anticolonial thinkers, feminists make clear how predominant justifications of violence depend on various forms of drawing the line—between means and ends, violence and non-violence, or good and bad violence—that are neither empirically nor analytically sustainable" (175). Besides neglecting to clarify or support the vague assertion that feminist thinkers are "even more radical" than Marxist, anarchist, and anticolonial thinkers, the declaration itself bizarrely writes out of existence the possibility for and reality of Marxist feminism, anarchist feminism, and anticolonial feminism. It is perhaps this same neglect that explains a notable exclusion from the book, an absence that itself seems constitutive.

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek, equal parts Slovenian and Hegelian, enjoys joke-telling as a path into understanding Hegel's philosophical offerings. One joke he especially enjoys telling is meant to help explain the Hegelian concept of determinate negation. The joke involves a customer who orders coffee without cream, only for the waiter to respond, "Sorry, but we have run out of cream. Can I bring you coffee without milk?"[2] Žižek explains that, in "both cases, the customer gets coffee alone, but this One-coffee is each time accompanied by a different negation, first coffee-with-no-cream, then coffee-with-no-milk."[3] Materially, there is no difference between the coffee without milk and the coffee without cream, but symbolically there is indeed a difference: two distinct absences ("without milk" versus "without cream") create two different coffees that exist on the

ideational plane of desire and meaning. Different negative reference points are constitutive of different realities. One "without" is distinct from another "without," resulting in a meaningful difference (quite literally, a difference in the realm of meaning). In the case of *Violence and Political Theory,* the absence that seems constitutive relates to the (under)theorizing of race, racial violence, and white supremacy.

According to the authors, their book is meant to evaluate thinkers who "exemplify certain positions on the question of violence and politics in the history of political thought," and also "continue to provide resources for thinking about the relations between violence and politics in the contemporary world" (7). Of the twenty-six thinkers included in *Violence and Political Theory*, two are people of color: Frantz Fanon and Mohandas Gandhi are both included in the chapter on "Violence and the Transformation of Man." Gandhi likely needs no introduction. Frantz Fanon, the existentialist, Pan-Africanist, and revolutionary, is renowned for his Hegelian and psychoanalytic analysis of white supremacy under settler colonialism. As mentioned earlier in this review, Gandhi's treatment of violence and politics is analyzed by the authors through the lens of how his virtues of nonviolence are gendered. The authors approach and frame Fanon's theorizing similarly. Frazer and Hutchings note that Fanon "exposes how gendering and racializing categories come together in the colonial mindset" (145). The authors go on to detail how gendering categories come together for Fanon. They do not, however, reveal, explore, or explain how racializing categories function in Fanon's theorizing. We do not learn about how, in *Black Skins, White Masks,* Fanon describes colonization as involving a racialized process he names *epidermalization*.[4] We do not learn that the revolutionary violence that Fanon describes as psychologically cleansing relates to the internalized oppression and inferiority complex created by the racialization process integral to settler colonialism.[5] Instead, we learn that, "*Wretched of the Earth* tells us that colonialism must be violently fought because it emasculates men, and 'Algeria Unveiled' tells us that it must be violently fought because it violates women" (148–149). In this foregrounding, the white supremacy of settler colonialism recedes from view. This is not the only occasion in the book in which this takes places.

The authors note in their final chapter that "the rhetoric through which theorists attempt to make their justificatory arguments persuasive locks us into a way of imagining the world order that reproduces rather than challenges familiar hierarchies of gender, race and class" (189). The Black Marxist feminism that the authors not only ignore, but that they imply would combine mutually

exclusive categories (of feminism and Marxism), is but one theoretical approach that seeks to imagine the world anew, in part by understanding gender, race, and class as intersections that must be theorized together. From Arendt we learn that violence is mute. It does not speak, it silences.[6] The exclusion of race, white supremacy, and especially black radical feminists from a text suffused with feminist analysis—this too is a kind of silencing, a making mute. This too, might be theorized as a kind of violence.

ALEXIOS ALEXANDER
EASTERN UNIVERSITY

Notes

1. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *The American Political Science Review* 63.4 (1969): 1076. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1955072
2. Slavoj Žižek, *Žižek's Jokes (Did you hear the one about Hegel and negation?)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 47.
3. Ibid.
4. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008), 4.
5. Ibid., 9 and passim.
6. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), 25.