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Eric Pianowski on Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions edited by Sally Cameron and Edward Newman. New York: United Nations University Press, 2008. 284 pp.

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Abstract

A review of:

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Keywords

Human trafficking, Human rights, United Nations

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Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions edited by Sally Cameron and Edward Newman. New York: United Nations University Press, 2008. 284 pp.

The eleven essays of Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions aim to register the pulse of the human trafficking crisis as it is felt in 2008. As is standard operating procedure, the book quickly points to the nascent nature of the discipline and cites the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, as the foundation of all efforts against the crime. In doing so, the authors link many of the subsequent essays to past ideas and attitudes, many of which have been repeatedly covered. However, and to their credit, about half of the essayists do manage to step beyond these more basic observations by placing their discussions firmly within the boundaries of more current and critical themes, particularly globalization and national sovereignty, the legal politics of migration, and the role of transnational organized crime. The other half of the authors present essays in which more common themes are analyzed by discussing them in light of regional experiences.

Divided into two parts, Trafficking in Humans does offer a few excellent studies on the ever-evolving nature of the crime as well as the more standard, expertly written yet now cliché, scholarly essays. *Part I: Themes* contains five essays dealing with structural factors of human trafficking, globalization and sovereignty, trafficking of women for prostitution, legal rights of migrant women, and the role of transnational organized crime in trafficking. Of particular note are the insightful works of Kinsey Alden Dinan (“Globalization and Sovereignty”) and Phil Williams (“Roles of Transnational Organized Crime”). These two pieces offer the most current scholarly knowledge combined with a wealth of original thought. Williams, for example, goes into detail on the actual typologies of the “traffickers.” He describes five distinctions on a spectrum ranging from “opportunistic amateur” up to transnational criminal organizations with broad portfolios and discusses the mechanisms of trafficking relevant to each type.

Part II: Regional Experiences contains essays that focus on five regions, namely Europe, East and South-East Asia, Latin America, South Asia/Nepal, and the South Caucasus. Here, experienced readers will be familiar with some of the structural factors that lead people to international migration, while novices to the study will be presented with the solid fundamentals of international trafficking and the wide range of regional factors that sustain the business. Most noteworthy in this section is Gulnara Shahinian’s essay dealing with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This study wrestles with the critical issue of trafficking and democracy building, and uses the three case studies as a quasi-litmus test for how successful international organizations have been in addressing issues of human trafficking in developing states.

To date, scholarly works that address the enigmatic issues surrounding human trafficking tend to first regurgitate what is already known about their particular area. This was largely the case with about half of the eleven essays contained in Trafficking in Humans, a fact that is acceptable only if (1) the authors step beyond this common knowledge in order to make new conclusions, or (2) the writers intend their audiences to be mere novices of the discipline. Perhaps half of the eleven essays do succeed in delivering perspectives that few in the field have yet considered. This was particularly the case in the pieces by Phil Williams, Kinsey Alden Dinan, and Gulnara Shahinian. Yet even those works that failed in creating fresh nuances are nevertheless worthy of praise for the way they set out the fundamental parameters of the issue in a clear and concise manner.

Therefore, it should be reiterated that Trafficking in Humans does present new angles critical of the discussion on trafficking, while also providing those less well versed with the issue a solid point of debarkation into the field. Finally, while it is largely recognized that one book cannot cover the entire spectrum of human trafficking issues, it should be pointed out that it delves very little, if at all, into such key issues as border control, political corruption, and strengthening/developing a state's legal code with relevance to human trafficking.

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