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Mirjam Van Reisen Munyaradzi Mawere, Mia Stokmans & Kinfe Abraha Gebre-Egziabher (Eds.). *Mobile Africa: Human Trafficking and the Digital Divide*. Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2019. xviii. 739pp. ISBN-13: 978-9956-551-13-2.

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This edited volume is a collection of 23 chapters divided into five parts. Broadly, the volume promises to engage with the ways in which information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the lack of connectivity or access to the technologies contributes to human trafficking in Africa. It posits that the people who lack access are vulnerable to human trafficking. And though not categorically stated, the trafficked seem to be generally destined for Europe.

Part I, 'Theoretical Perspectives', comprises four chapters that lay down the theoretical grounding of the book. The part engages in the historical evolution of a digital divide represented by 'black holes' that demonstrate that people in Africa are disconnected from the global digital infrastructure and that they rely on 'gatekeepers' to access information from/in that infrastructure. Their disconnection from the infrastructure makes the ill-informed people vulnerable to the gatekeepers who exploit them through human trafficking.

Part II, 'Traumatising Trajectories', comprises nine chapters. It sets out with a discussion of the dismal conditions that send people away from their country of origin on migratory journeys. The part goes on to discuss the abuse, stress, extortion, torture and slavery that migrants and refugees suffer at the hands of human traffickers and under the brunt of state policy and administrative rules on their way to, in and removal from destination countries.

Part III, 'Psychological Impact of Ongoing Trauma', includes three chapters and seems to build on the traumatising experiences that migrants and refugees suffer on their journeys. It discusses the impacts of such trauma on parenting and the development of children. It also explores relationships between refugee minors and caregivers in a refugee camp and the hopes of refugees to reunite with their families under uncertain application procedures and requirements. Part IV, 'Problem Framing', contains two chapters that provide a policy perspective through which to explore human trafficking problems. The section posits that policy language impacts the situations in which refugees and migrants find themselves and the solutions that are consequently proposed.

Part V, 'Extra-territorialisation of Migration and International Responsibilities', contains five chapters. It picks up from the previous part to consider the broader policy context in which human trafficking occurs. The part particularly describes trends in policy—especially the European Union's (EU) complicit engagement with governments (i.e., of Libya and South Sudan) whose human rights records are questionable as well as the complicit behaviour of European international non-government organisations (INGOs), which conveniently ignore crimes against humanity committed by authorities in migrant sending countries (particularly, Syria).

The book's point of departure seems to be Manuel Castell's (1996, 1997, 1998) argument, in his three-volume seminal work on *The Information Age* including, *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996); *The Power of Identity* (1997); and *The End of Millennium* (1998). Castells argues that, "new information technologies have spread throughout the globe" but

“there are large areas of the world, and considerable segments of the population, switched off from the new technological system” (1996, pp. 32-33).

The book under review focuses on what it calls “black holes” (Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 5; Chapter 6) in Africa, which it posits are a consequence of the historic and unbalanced global development of a digital architecture. That architecture is a social construction in which information and resources are extracted from Africa (Chapter 1). Chapter 1, which (along with Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) essentially lays down the theoretical foundation of the book, argues that the black holes represent disconnection of people in/from the global digital infrastructure too. And this, it argues, makes the disconnected people (i.e., those who live in black holes) dependant on gatekeepers for information. This dependency, the chapter argues, exposes the people in question to exploitation by ‘gatekeepers’ of information through human trafficking.

Castells (1996; 1997; 1998), to whom may actually be attributed the coining of the concept ‘black holes’ in digital global informational capitalism (1996, p. 2 & 410), instead argues that the switched-off areas are not confined to Africa. They are, rather, “culturally and spatially discontinuous: they are in the American inner cities or in the French banlieues, as much as in the shanty towns of Africa or in the deprived rural areas of China or India” (Castells 1996, p. 33). In fact, in his third volume, Castells (1998) speaks of a globally pervasive social exclusion from the digital economy. According to him, the societies and people thus excluded constitute a ‘Fourth World’. In his own words,

“The Fourth World comprises large areas of the globe, such as much of Sub-Saharan Africa, and impoverished rural areas of Latin America and Asia. But it is also present in literally every country, and every city, in this new geography of social exclusion. It is formed of American inner-city ghettos, Spanish enclaves of mass youth unemployment, French banlieues warehousing North Africans, Japanese Yoseba quarters, and Asian mega-cities’ shanty towns. And it is populated by millions of homeless, incarcerated, prostituted, criminalized, brutalized, stigmatized, sick, and illiterate persons. They are the majority in some areas, the minority in others, and a tiny minority in a few privileged contexts. But, everywhere, they are growing in number, and increasing in visibility, as the selective triage of informational capitalism, and the political breakdown of the welfare state, intensify social exclusion. In the current historical context, the rise of the Fourth World is inseparable from the rise of informational global capitalism” (Castells 1998, pp. 169-170).

Castells’ millions of prostituted, brutalized, criminalized and homeless seem to be the focus of the book under review. Only that, for the book under review, such people constitute Africans. Thus, in an attempt to explain the way in which digitalisation is associated with new forms of human trafficking, the authors of Chapter 1, for instance, ask if the knowledge society facilitates trade in people (p. 4). That the knowledge society enables people trade is obvious, and substantially researched (see, e.g., Gow et al., 2015; Leng, Khan, & Rahim, 2014; Sarkar, 2015; Wex, Latonero, Dank, & Poucki, 2015). The question posed in the book under review whether the “*the knowledge society [provides] an enabling environment for the trade in people*” (p. 4) may, therefore, be somewhat redundant. As an introductory chapter and one that lays down the foundation for the volume, Chapter 1 of the book under review would, therefore, have done a better job of rather probing or, at least, raising theoretical questions about the ways in which that environment of ‘people trade’ is actually created in the information age. This would have allowed for deeper analysis of the longstanding and increasingly sophisticated problem of how information and ICTs are (mis)used to achieve the interests of various (ab)users.

In essence, the volume ends up failing to holistically address what seems to be its central question, “*How can the association between digitalisation and new forms of human trafficking be explained?*” (p. 4). This deficit is evident in and explains why most of the chapters in the volume (e.g., Chapter 7; Chapter 8; Chapter 9; Chapter 11; Chapter 13, Chapter 14; Chapter 15; Chapter 18; Chapter 19; Chapter 20; Chapter 21; Chapter 22; Chapter 23) do not even engage with ICTs or the digital divide vis-à-vis human trafficking, refugees, child refugees and unaccompanied minors, or migration in Africa suggested in the title of the book. The latter four concepts, which are variously employed in the volume also point to its second major shortcoming. It does not make any attempt to centrally conceptualise or frame *human trafficking* in and vis-à-vis the digital divide. The only place where an actual definition of human trafficking is attempted in the book is Chapter 13.

Defining human trafficking is significant for reasons beyond the necessity of avoiding problems associated with conflating migration terminologies at conceptual and policy levels. Debates exist for instance around, among other things, the history of human trafficking (when it started); the distinction between trafficking and slavery; and the criminalisation of trafficking. Regarding approaches to labour trafficking, for example, Piper et al. (2015) argue that it makes a difference to be clear whether one adopts a narrow definition that refers to trafficking, sex work, forced labour, and slavery, or adopts an expansive or purposefully broad definition. Piper et al. say this helps understand why a definition is used. They, further, say it helps in clarifying what the defined concept captures or does not. Doing this has implications for research and advocacy, besides enabling the identification of cause and effect. Based on this, Piper et al posit that the framework that adopts a forced labour approach (rather than trafficking) promotes the contention for systemic change in the interest of the people affected. Piper et al.’s argument resonates with human trafficking situations in regions like Southern Africa, where the nature and scale of human trafficking is difficult to determine (Nshimbi & Moyo, 2016). Nshimbi and Moyo, point to confusion in defining and differentiating terms—between human trafficking, human smuggling and sex work. They argue that the confusion arises from the dearth of official statistics on these matters and the absence of legislation that categorically punishes human trafficking as a crime. Because of this, Nshimbi and Moyo argue that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region faces the double challenge of implementing anti-human trafficking legislation and establishing an effective anti-trafficking framework. This state of affairs, and especially the lack of information on the reality of human trafficking, they argue, makes it difficult to even begin to assess the root causes. Yet, this is what contributions like Chapter 3 in the book under review still attempt to do.

Most of the chapters in the volume also focus on or discuss Eritrean refugees and migrants in Ethiopia or on their way to Europe via Libya, in Sudan and on their way to or from the Middle East. In other words, the contributions in the book broadly engage in refugee and migrant issues affecting people from Eritrea. Considering the title of the book, *Mobile Africa: Human Trafficking and the Digital Divide* it becomes clear that the title is not only misleading but the book also falls in the same trap of/or adopts the same Eurocentric tendency to tag anything from any part of Africa, irrespective of size or corner of the continent, to represent the whole of the continent. And this is despite the fact that the volume employs decolonial language here and there. Whichever way one considers it, Eritrea does not provide a typical representation of socioeconomic and political realities on the African continent. Precisely, the volume does not comprehensively or holistically engage with human trafficking across Africa.

The attempt (in the book) to liken the setup of the contemporary global digital architecture and associate the digital divide and migration processes (e.g., in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 7, Chapter 10, Chapter 18) to colonial information structures is, however, interesting. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 particularly attempt to relate what the decolonial literature denotes as the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) with

contemporary controllers of digital information who exploit information for human trafficking. Chapter 1 actually posits that the current digital information infrastructure is built on 16th and 17th century routes and nodes upon which information was transmitted from the colonies to knowledge centres in Europe. In arguing that “As in the past, the contemporary information society supports the digital traffic to its centres, thereby supporting the basing of economic activity on historic architectures” (p 10), Chapter 1, in the language of decolonial thought, speaks to continued domination of African countries by Western countries, despite colonialism having ended decades ago.

Whereas European explorers or imperial companies (e.g., Dutch Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie (MCC) and its representatives in London) logged and passed on information from captured ships to imperial knowledge centres (Chapter 1, p. 6), showing a clear connection/association between explorer-companies and imperial governments, the chapters in the book, however, do not really explain whether a direct connection exists in the 21st century between the human traffickers depicted as gatekeepers of information in the digital highway and European governments, or even African governments—particularly the Eritrean, which the book calls a gatekeeper (see, e.g., Chapter 2, p40). Unravelling this could have helped proffer some solutions to the vice of human trafficking.

The authors in the book could have, also, engaged further and deeper with the literature on the slave trade and colonisers’ concerted efforts to completely dominate subjugated peoples (in this case Africans) in the discussion of the development of the Eurocentric “knowledge society” (p5-7), and “information network”. The effects of that enterprise, which persist to date (Grosfoguel, Le Bot, & Poli, 2011; Grosfoguel, Oso, & Christou, 2014), were such that they dehumanized the subjugated people in all ways possible. This results in the coloniality of knowledge, power and being.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, the book under review, like many other studies and discourses on migration, overly presents migrants and refugees as vulnerable. This robs them of any agency. Added to this, are tendencies to blame governments of migrant receiving/host countries for violating migrants’ rights while absolving the actions of sending and transit countries. Parts IV and V of the book also generally point out that besides the EU, international nongovernmental organizations and actors such as the UN, particularly the Security Council, should be held accountable for what happens in those countries. While the EU’s complicity in countries like Libya, indeed, deserves denouncing, what about the so-called UN-backed government and the perpetrators and warring factions there? And what about the AU’s deafening silence on the goings-on in its member states?

The last and perhaps jumbled issue in the book relates to how it is structured. Part IV, ‘Problem Framing’ could have been better placed immediately before or after Part I, which sets out the theoretical framework of the volume. Part IV deals with policy and issues that “point to the need for governance aimed at protecting people and promoting wellbeing” (p. xviii). Placing it at the head, just after Part I, would have befittingly provided the macro and policy framework and overview in which issues concerning people subjected to human trafficking, refugees, migrants and deportees are discussed—and into which the rest of the sections and chapters of the book delve. More so, because the editors view Part IV as “problem framing”. All in all, the case studies that make up the chapters of the book do provide valuable primary information about refugees and deportees. It also contains the authors’ first hand experiences and interactions with refugees and migrants, especially in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Students, policy makers, civil society and other actors interested in refugee issues will find some of those accounts valuable.

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