

# *Human Trafficking and Security in Southern Africa: The South African and Mozambican Experience*

By **Richard Obinna Iroanya**

Palgrave Macmillan. 2018. xv + pp. 253  
ISBN: 978-3-319-71988-7

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## **Introduction**

Human trafficking is defined by the United Nations (UN) as envisaging acts of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, or coercion) for improper purposes, which include forced labour and sexual exploitation (UN General Assembly 2000). Globally, human trafficking constitutes a security threat and it has been intensifying as a result of globalisation that has brought about the erosion of national boundaries and borderlands and has led to an increase in the free movement of people across frontiers.

Iroanya based his book, *Human Trafficking and Security in Southern Africa: The South African and Mozambican Experience*, on his doctoral thesis. It presents a comprehensive discussion and analysis of human trafficking in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The author adopts a case-based approach involving the country-specific test cases of South Africa and Mozambique. He conducted an extensive review of primary and secondary data sources to provide an in-depth analysis of the trends and trajectories of human trafficking as well as the efficacy of anti-human-trafficking policy responses by both governments. In the book, Iroanya uncovers the complexity of the crime of human trafficking and its transnational elements, which are equivalent to organised crime.

Regarding the conceptual dimensions of human trafficking, which are extensively discussed in the second chapter, the book locates the discussion on human trafficking within the broader confines of the human security paradigm. Categorically, Iroanya

argues from the viewpoint of new security thinking (human security paradigm) about the post-Cold War international dispensation that broadens the conception of security to include non-military threats to humanity (Shahrbanou and Chenoy 2007; UNDP 1994). The human security dimension proffered by Iroanya departs from the traditional militaristic notions of security, and this helps to provide a more nuanced analysis of human trafficking and its proclivity to undermine individual, national and international security. The most striking aspect of the human trafficking-security nexus is that the author manages to clear up the confusion between the concept of human trafficking and related concepts such as smuggling and illegal migration. The book discusses the modus operandi of human traffickers such as the use of force, coercive measures, manipulation and deception as well as the inhuman environments, such as forced labour and sexual exploitation, that most victims find themselves in. Some of the horrors of human trafficking that the book reveals include the worst acts of trafficking such as those involving body organs (e.g. the kidney and the heart).

The book offers valuable insights to the reader by demonstrating that human trafficking is a global challenge as old as the human race itself. This is captured in the comprehensive discussion of global multilateral conventions and protocols for combating human trafficking. The 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are classical examples of the longevity of the challenge of human trafficking. From a global perspective on human trafficking, the book shows that the problem is being aggravated by the porousness of the borders between countries; this explains the transnational dimensions of human trafficking. Insights into global trends that are provided are that Asia and the Pacific have the largest global share of human trafficking whereas in Africa the challenge has only peaked since the new millennium (US Department of State 2017). As noted by Iroanya, traffickers take advantage of the fractures within the porousness of borders and the shortcomings of police forces, which militate against several efforts to combat the challenge of human trafficking.

A regional profiling of human trafficking provided in the book shows that women and children are most often the victims and that traffickers capitalise on social, economic and political factors such as poverty, conflicts and wars. An incisive deduction by the author is that authoritarian regimes (especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America) that disregard the human rights of their people and their general welfare create conditions that traffickers exploit. It reasons that when human security is under threat, migration of people and their crossing of borders and frontiers follow. During these desperate journeys, people are forcibly trafficked. Another observation that establishes an

inseparable link between human trafficking and migration is the reference to the collapse of the Soviet Empire when most former Soviet states faced economic and political instability thereby forcing citizens to migrate to stable economies in Europe and the Scandinavian countries. The same trend has been seen in Latin America where civil wars and banditry incursions have displaced people.

A broader historical analysis of human trafficking in Africa provided in the book reveals that the problem of human trafficking has been in existence for a long period of time. This is evidenced by, for example, the Transatlantic Slave Trade during the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. What is captivating about Iroanya's discussion of the genesis of human trafficking on the African continent is his critique of the analysis of human trafficking by Barry Buzan. Iroanya's critical engagement with the plight of human trafficking globally succeeds in refuting conventional analyses that position the trafficking of white women in the nineteenth century as a classic example of the manifestation of the problem globally. Major factors fuelling human trafficking in the post-Cold War international dispensation as highlighted in the book include instability on the African continent. Iroanya specifically singles out civil wars and conflicts in the Great Lakes Region that have necessitated massive trafficking of people to various global destinations.

The book goes on to discuss policy and legislative responses at a multilateral level in Africa, and the author cites the 1986 African Charter on Human and People's Rights that is acknowledged as the first continental initiative towards mitigating the crime of human trafficking. The fact that the Charter clearly outlaws trafficking of people resonates with the vision and aspirations of the global instruments and protocols on human trafficking mentioned earlier. The book further discusses related continental policies and legislations such as the Ougadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, especially women and children, and the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Such initiatives show the African Union's proactive stance in fighting the crime of human trafficking. Filtering down to the SADC sub-regional level, the SADC Strategic Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2009–2019) is among the significant legal frameworks implemented by the region. This is also an acknowledgement of the severity of the crime of human trafficking in the region.

The SADC region, which is the context of the two case studies, serves the triad purpose of being the source, the transit and the destination of human trafficking. In this case, South Africa has emerged as being the destination whereas the bulk of the regional countries are donors or sources. To explain this phenomenon, Iroanya looks at historical antecedents in the region since the discovery of diamonds in the seventeenth century and the Dutch East India settlement at the Cape in 1652. He argues that migrant

labourers across the region have been flocking to South Africa for employment purposes since then, and that the numbers have increased since the increase in fluidity and porousness of borders. South Africa continues to receive migrant workers in gigantic proportions (Nshimbi and Fioramonti 2014). It has emerged that foreign nationals, in their quest for greener pastures, have found themselves entrapped in human trafficking. The problem has been exacerbated by factors such as geographic proximity, border connectors, and corruption at borders.

Iroanya touches on the lived realities of human trafficking in South Africa that show that in terms of international and regional dimensions, human trafficking is quite prevalent in the country. Several reasons are proffered to explain the domestic situation. Iroanya refers to the ripple effects of the apartheid system that impoverished people, especially those in the rural areas, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation as sex slaves and labourers and to recruitment as gangsters by agents in major cities. Again, the projection of South Africa as a rainbow nation (HSRC 2010), coupled with relative economic and political stability, has attracted an influx of foreign nationals. Iroanya succeeds in revealing that while South Africa has a long history of migrant workers, receptive immigration policies have seen the country being used as a base by traffickers. A deep and incisive analysis of human trafficking through the prism of the youth shows that South Africa, like any other African country, has a relatively young population. As a result, the socio-economic matrix shows that very few of the youth are employed and end up falling prey to traffickers. Boys are said to be recruited for crime and drug business whereas young girls are forced into sexual exploitation.

A shocking revelation in the book is that young boys and adolescent girls in modern-day South Africa want to “live large” and afford the life styles of wealthy and successful people. Iroanya has established that this desire renders them vulnerable to traffickers as they are promised heaven on earth. The book further reveals that ritual murders are related to human trafficking. This phenomenon is said to be quite common in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal and Venda. Especially if one considers several reports on ritual killings in the country, Iroanya quite rightly recommends that further research on this phenomenon should be conducted.

A salient revelation by Iroanya in the analysis of human trafficking trends in South Africa is that many studies overemphasise that women and children are victims of sexual exploitation by traffickers. Iroanya is correct when he observes that this myopic view waters down the experiences that males have of sexual exploitation. Iroanya could also have extended this discussion in the context of the legalisation of homosexuality in South Africa.

In regard to regional integration in SADC countries, Iroanya submits that while it has economic, social and political dividends, visa-free arrangements in the context of South Africa have shortcomings. The concession that SADC citizens can enter South Africa without visas militates against regional commitments as the facilities and policies get increasingly abused by traffickers.

Regarding the human trafficking situation in Mozambique, Iroanya indicates that a comprehensive analysis of the trends and trajectories of the challenge has shown that unlike South Africa, which is renowned for being a destination for the trafficking business, Mozambique is largely a source country. Iroanya's historical analysis shows that conventionally, men were trafficked to work in mines, on farms and in production sectors whereas women and young girls were trafficked across the frontiers of the country for sexual exploitation. Interestingly, his study shows that the destinations were largely Portugal and other European countries. In Africa, South Africa was the destination. Another geographical factor fuelling trafficking of people as articulated in the book is that Mozambique's coastal location provides an exit point. The book delves into other social, economic and political factors that amplify the human trafficking situation in Mozambique. It emerges that Mozambique, since its independence in 1975, has not enjoyed sustainable peace and that the prolonged civil war in the country has retarded economic growth and subjected the citizens to despicable poverty and misery. The human costs of the civil war have been great; Mozambique has experienced massive displacements of people, many of whom have fled to neighbouring countries for safety reasons and in search of a better life. As in the case of any other conflict, the civil conditions were exploited by traffickers, and many of the victims were women and young girls who experienced sexual exploitation. The book exposes that the civil war created the challenge of child- and female-headed households, leaving many prey to traffickers. Another appalling revelation is that the civil war created lawlessness; hence there are high levels of child labour in more than one sector. A patriarchal narrative on the plight of human trafficking presented by Iroanya shows that women and girls have no land rights and many have not been accorded the right to education. This further explains their vulnerability to labour and domestic exploitation. Iroanya indicates that, just like in South Africa, human trafficking in Mozambique is more pronounced in the rural areas where the poor people are the prime targets. In essence, Iroanya concludes that human trafficking thrives in poverty-stricken and conflict-prone countries.

In addition to chronicling the human trafficking trends and trajectories in South Africa and Mozambique, Iroanya should be commended for also providing an analysis of the policy and legislative responses by both countries. A well-thought-out comparative analysis of both cases acknowledges that the Palermo Protocol of 2000 serves as the manual guiding domestic initiatives towards combating the crime of human trafficking in both countries. Fundamentally, Iroanya succeeds in revealing that despite some lapses

in respect of migration and border controls in both countries, a number of policies that have been instituted by both governments provide evidence of proactive responses. The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill (PCTPB) promulgated in 2010 and passed into law in 2013 signifies a more nuanced response to the crime of trafficking in South Africa. Iroanya discusses related pieces of legislation prior to this 2013 Bill, such as the Children's Act of 2005 that is aimed at combating exploitation, abuse and trafficking of children into or through the frontiers of South Africa. Quite significant about this important Act is that it outlaws the travelling of minors without the consent of either of the parents. The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act of 2007, which criminalises trafficking of people for sexual exploitation, is, just like the 2005 Children's Act, a precursor to the 2013 PCTPB.

As fittingly argued in the book, despite resource limitations and other major setbacks, such as the prolonged civil war in Mozambique, Iroanya provides a balanced analysis that appreciates the proactive role played by the Government of Mozambique. He accomplishes this by submitting that as early as in December 2000, Mozambique ratified the Palermo Protocol that was entered into law in 2008. In commending Mozambique's commitment to fighting human trafficking, the author acknowledges national initiatives prior to the Palermo Protocol such as the 1996 National Campaign against Child Abuse and the 2000 National Campaign against Sexual Abuse of Children. These, together with the Palermo initiative, signify an acknowledgement of the severity of the crime of human trafficking and the willingness to fight it.

Against the deeper and penetrative analysis of the human trafficking situation in South Africa and Mozambique, one would expect the book to at least factor in how South Africa's membership of the BRICS bloc of emerging economies has impacted on human trafficking trends. It is yet to be reasoned whether BRICS will be instrumental in combating or intensifying the challenge given that many of the BRICS countries are destinations of international trafficking of humans. In the 21st-century international dispensation, matters of human trafficking resonate with notions of the responsibility to protect (RtoP). The book could therefore have included the RtoP perspective in addressing the challenge of human trafficking. Methodologically, the study is largely a desk research and it could have benefited the reader if interviews were employed. This could have helped strengthen the study findings by providing further primary verbal information, especially in capturing original voices from concerned parties. Fundamentally, Iroanya presents a solid finding that the plight of human trafficking is exacerbated by a lack of political will in the SADC region and in Africa at large. This is true in light of successive conflicts and civil wars in Africa. It is my opinion that the author should have further provided a model for mobilising political will. Having identified the gap relating to a lack of political will, the author should have supported his argument by providing modalities on how to bridge that gap.

Notwithstanding the above deliberated minor shortcomings in the book, Iroanya's book provides a timely contribution to the debate on human trafficking and the increasing global migration crisis. What I like most about the book is that it conveys a global Southern perspective on human trafficking as opposed to existing dominant narratives on human security from the North. Another value of the book is that it supports the decoloniality agenda on knowledge construction and epistemological access based on domestic experiences and as chronicled through the lenses of African scholars. Iroanya's writing style is quite lucid, and all readers, ranging from academics, policy practitioners and students to avid readers on security and politics, will find it user friendly. In a nutshell, I would not hesitate to prescribe this book to my students as it provides a well-thought-out analysis of the human trafficking situation in the SADC region.

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