

***A review of Human Trafficking and the Feminization of Poverty: Structural Violence in Cambodia, by Yuko Shimazaki***

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Human trafficking is widely recognized as a form of modern-day slavery. Shimazaki's book is a compassionate, optimistic, ethically-sound offering that is specifically crafted to help eliminate and prevent this major social problem. Utilizing qualitative methods, including the twelve years of field research, observations, visual documentation, and interviews, she draws empirically and theoretically informed conclusions about why human trafficking occurs, who the victims are in the context of Cambodia, and what makes someone a target of human trafficking. Interviewees were either selected at random or through snowball samples and include: (1) the victims of human trafficking and their family members; (2) staff members of international organizations and NGOs; and (3) administrative chiefs, the village leaders and the members of the neighborhood association, the residents of the same village, and experts familiar with the actual condition of the research areas.

Shimazaki examines major causes of violence against women and children, the cycle of abuse, and persistent abject poverty that enables human trafficking, or "the commercial trade of persons and the crime of buying and selling them as commercial items," that results in any combination of the following: exploitation, servitude or enslavement, and loss of human rights (p. xi). Victims are trafficked for different forms of labor, based on gender and age. Women's jobs include forced prostitution, begging, domestic work, and working in a construction site. Males work in deep-sea fishing, factories for processing fish, farming, and working at a construction site. Lastly, children are bought and sold to be accompaniment to beggars in addition to the forced labor industries that women and men work in.

Informed by world system theory, gender analyses, the concept of structural violence, and the theory of capability, Shimazaki contextualizes the broader causations of the ground-level experiences of the victims in her scientific story. Through individual case-studies of victims, she illustrates the formidable reality of the daily experiences of millions of trafficking victims. Rotah, for example, was a 14-year-old girl who resided with her mother and three siblings. Neither Rotah nor her siblings ever went to school, as they barely made enough money to scrape by. Rotah's father was a migrant laborer who was counted on by his family to send money to stay afloat, but he never did, which put his family in a position of acute vulnerability. After being



deceived into human trafficking by a family “friend” that she thought she could trust, she was sexually abused, prostituted, and forced to do domestic labor. Because of long-enforced traditional gender norms in Cambodian society, and despite the fact that she was raped and justice was served to the offender, she was shunned and abused by previously friendly inhabitants of her rural village.

As a second example, Niam was a 43-year-old woman who had moved to Poipet. A woman acquaintance, who turned out to be a trafficker, convinced her to “rent” her two-year-old child in exchange for desperately needed money. Though she was suspicious of the offer, she eventually gave in and would bitterly regret that she would never see her daughter again. The author highlights the complex dynamics of the situation, as Niam’s children were abused by her as a chain reaction to the domestic violence she experienced from the drunken, unemployed father of the children. Shimazaki observes that Niam could be perceived as either an offender who sold her daughter or as a victim whose daughter was trafficked.

This book is an important contribution to the international rural criminological literature, as the author captures unique challenges associated with rurality in Cambodia and Greater Mekong. From one example of many, utilizing the case-study of 20-year-old Kunitah, the author demonstrates how the lack of the rural community’s support can exacerbate the chain-reaction of poverty. Kunitah, the youngest of four siblings, was the victim of domestic violence since childhood, and on a daily basis, she was kicked and beaten with a wooden stick. After being forcefully raped twice, she finally gained the courage to inform her parents, and as a result, they were ashamed. Word spread around the village that Kunitah was a victim of domestic violence, and this ended up being a proverbial nail in the coffin to her family socially, as they were now entirely isolated, as opposed to just being discriminated against for their poverty before the incident. Kunitah was approached by a trafficker while selling vegetables in the fruit market, and was taken to a brothel, kept in a locked room, and was never paid. As victims like Kunitah are silenced, representing a form of structural violence, the reader can see how it this form of slavey is perpetuated by the lack of a system of mutual support for victims.

The author recognizes the numerous types of abusive behaviors that trafficking victims endure (i.e., physical, emotional, and sexual), but did not explicitly employ the term *poly-victimization*, (multiple victimizations of different kinds), which may have more accurately captured the range of violent experiences human trafficking victims endure. Furthermore, an informed application of Kelly’s (1987) *continuum of sexual violence* may have accounted for the more nuanced, interlinked experiences of trafficking victims. Moreover, additional theoretical and cultural knowledge regarding the relationship between violence and masculinity in the Cambodian context would have been especially informative in understanding the feminization of poverty. Nonetheless, Shimazaki leaves the reader with a base theoretical toolkit and informative takeaways of the force of violence in the Cambodian context.

In sum, it is essential for rural criminologists to develop a richer understanding of both the breadth and depth of information about human trafficking. Shimazaki's inspirational and digestible contributions to the field help us achieve this goal. She provides a well-informed perspective on why women in Cambodia in particular are impoverished and trafficked, and most importantly, what can be done to help them. As she states, "if she is a victim of sexual violence, she deserves to be cared for and put under protection" (p. 56).

## References

Kelly, L. (1987). The continuum of sexual violence. In J. Hanmer & M. Maynard (Eds.), *Women, Violence and Social Control* (pp. 46–60). Palgrave Macmillan UK.  
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