Sex at the Margins: Migration, labour markets and the rescue industry
Laura Maria Agustin, Zed Books, London, 2007, 248pp., ISBN 978-1-84277-860-9, £16.99 (Pbk); 978-1-84277-859-3, £60.00 (Hbk).

Rethinking Trafficking in Women: Politics out of security
Claudia Aradau, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2008, 225pp., ISBN 987-0-230-57331-4, £55.00 (Hbk)

Since the early 1990s, popular credence has increasingly been given to several claims about 'human trafficking': that it is an immensely profitable criminal business taking place on a vast scale all around the world; that it mostly involves the transport of women and children into sexual slavery; and that virtually everywhere, prostitution now almost exclusively involves the abuse and exploitation of 'trafficked sex slaves'. Though such ideas have come to exert a powerful influence on national and international policymaking, they have not gone unchallenged. Indeed, for over a decade, scholars and activists have been publishing books and articles that – in a variety of ways – critically deconstruct policy, media and popular discourse on trafficking, question the victimization rhetoric that it rests upon and reproduces, demonstrate its role in legitimating increasingly repressive immigration regimes, and/or present research findings that illuminate the complex and highly variable relationship between migration, sex work and coercive employment relations (Chapkis, 1997; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; Doezema, 2001, to name but a few of the pioneers). Claudia Aradau and Laura Agustin are among those who have contributed to this critical literature on trafficking, and the books under review here build on their previously published work.

The core argument of Agustin's *Sex at the Margins* is that those she describes as 'social agents' or 'social helpers' have a vested interest in the rescue industry that has developed to save 'trafficked sex slaves', and so also in propagating a discourse that constructs all migrant women who sell sex as passive, helpless, 'victims of trafficking'. The book 'argues that social helpers consistently deny the agency of large numbers of working-class migrants, in a range of theoretical and practical moves whose object is management and control: the exercise of governmentality', and aims to show how social agents' current practices 'perpetuate a constructed class – "prostitute" – which justifies their actions and serves an isolationist immigration policy' (p. 8).

In *Rethinking Trafficking in Women*, Aradau's primary concern is with the logic and effects 'of security understood as a governmental practice that orders populations and constitutes forms of subjectivity through specific problematizations' (p. 7). The 'problematization' of human trafficking as a security issue leads to the ordering and sorting of persons into categories that are *either* risky and dangerous (and so must be ejected) *or* at risk and vulnerable (and so deserving of protection, rights and benefits). Trafficked women are deemed worthy of pity and increased security only to the extent that they are dis-identified from other dangerous categories of person – illegal migrants and prostitutes. And, according to Aradau, 'well-meaning projects' that approach trafficking as a subset of illegal migration, or as a problem of prostitution, or of human rights abuse, do not disrupt but are instead reincorporated into 'the problematization of security' (p. 6). A new politics is needed, she argues, a 'politics out of security'. This will involve the people who are currently 'divorced from the represented particularity' of trafficking, namely, illegal migrant sex workers, and will take place take place through their collective mobilization as 'workers addressed under the universal and egalitarian predicate of work' (p. 10).

Though often journeying through the same terrain (Aradau's book provides some fascinating, though tantalizingly brief, material on the practices of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the rescue, return and rehabilitation of trafficked women; Agustin presents extremely rich data from her own and others' interviews with migrant sex workers), the two books are written with very different audiences in mind. Agustin states that her book is aimed at both non-academic and academic readers (p. 8), but it makes more concessions to the former than the latter, developing an argument that is highly readable but not very rigorously connected to any existing body of relevant theory or research. The logic of the book's structure may also be unclear to the academic reader. Research design and methodology is not discussed until Chapter 5, and Chapter 4, which states that it will take 'a genealogical approach to the discourse on prostitutes as well as to that of helping them' (p. 97), focuses on what Agustin terms 'the rise of the social' in France and Britain, whereas Chapter 6 presents research data on contemporary social agents' discourse on helping prostitutes in Spain. Aradau's book, by contrast, is very heavily weighted down by its engagement with the details of theoretical debates that may seem arcane to anyone who is not a scholar of International Relations, or perhaps even to anyone outside the field of Security Studies.

Each book has many strengths, but the ways in which the authors position themselves in relation to others sometimes strikes a jarring note. In Chapter 1, Aradau mentions some of the literature critiquing dominant discourse on trafficking, but since her purpose is to dismiss all previous analyses on grounds

that, unlike *Rethinking Trafficking in Women*, they fail to problematize 'the problematization of security', the review glosses over many important nuances in the existing literature and omits mention of works that do not fit with her schematization. Critics of trafficking discourse are mentioned elsewhere in the book, but Aradau is always as pains to isolate her position from theirs rather than to reflect more gently on how her own 'problematization of security' may and may not usefully add to existing analyses. This sometimes leads her to overstate her case. For example, it is not true to say that *all* those who discuss trafficking in relation to migration (or 'vector' trafficking 'through migration' as she would put it) end up 'fostering the category of trafficked women' (p. 25), Agustin's work being a case in point. And the criticism appears all the more misplaced given that, without ever defining 'trafficking', Aradau herself continually employs the term 'trafficked women' as though it refers to a clearly bounded, objectively definable group ('Lithuania ... is the main country of origin for victims of trafficking' (p. 22); 'Trafficked women are continually suspected of not being genuine victims' (p. 29); 'If one considers the emancipation of trafficked women' (p. 75); 'While I do not intend to downplay the exceptional role that the experience of trafficking has for women's lives' (p. 110) and so on).

In *Sex at the Margins*, Agustin writes against 'social agents', a group she defines as including 'social workers, policy makers, individuals in charge of funding, religious personnel, counsellors, academics and NGO employees and volunteers, anyone who, in their work, consciously attempts to better other people's lives' (p. 5). This definition lumps together a politically heterogeneous band (those who work for Migration Watch UK *and* those who work for the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns or for the Institute of Race Relations; academics who promote the form of feminist fundamentalism Agustin criticizes *and* those who oppose it, for example). It is palpably untrue that *all* social agents, as defined above, 'consistently deny' migrants' agency in moves 'whose object is management and control', or 'perpetuate a constructed class – "prostitute" ', or serve 'an isolationist immigration policy' (p. 8), and one might expect *Sex at the Margins* to argue for political solidarity with those who do not. But since Agustin reduces politics to the 'desire to help others', all projects pursued by all social agents become commensurate: 'Do I believe that those concerned with social justice and helping should sit on their hands and do nothing? Frequently asked this question, I always reply No: the desires of helpers, activists and theorists, whether utopian or pragmatic, are as valid as any other' (p. 193). The real problem, Agustin continues, is that 'The power to define problems, terms and solutions rests with social agents, who debate how to get Others to behave differently', and who are too certain that they Know Best, as well as insufficiently reflexive about the role of their own desires and interests in framing what they know (pp. 187, 194).

Agustin rightly observes that 'trafficking' has become big business for middle class professionals. But if 'trafficking' is a gravy train, Agustin is no mere train spotter observing its passengers from afar. Her own fieldwork, travel and conference attendance was, presumably, funded and supported somehow (by 'social helpers' perhaps?) although no mention of this is made in the book's acknowledgements, and she too has secured status and a living on the back of 'trafficking'. Agustin does not reflect on this, however, for she does not recognize herself as a 'social agent' – 'I entered into the social sector's life but do not claim to have more than a partial vision of *their* culture' (p. 142, emphasis added). Acknowledging that she was riding the same train might have prompted Agustin to dwell more closely on the political differences between the other passengers, perhaps even to greet some of them as fellow travellers. This would have made the book's argument more messy, but I think it would ultimately also have made it more interesting.

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references

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