

BOOK REVIEWS

**Raluca Viman-Miller, Dlynn Armstrong Williams, (editors),
The Basics of Global Politics, Dahlonga: University of North
Georgia Press, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-940771-84-7, 534 pages**

Review by Cristina MATIUTA

Having an in-depth knowledge of multifaceted issues and actors that shape the world politics is crucial for understanding our political, economic and social global environment. The book signaled here – *The Basics of Global Politics*-, edited by Raluca Viman-Miller and Dlynn Armstrong Williams, is very useful to enhance our understanding of basic concepts, actors, theories, structures and processes of contemporary politics. It is addressed primarily to students in political science and international relations, but also to all those who want to comprehend the dynamics and complexity of the world we live in.

The volume is structured in four parts with a total of sixteen chapters. The contributors (Craig Greathouse, Jake Greear, Cristian Harris, Scott Meachum, Jonathan Miner, Nathan Price, Samuel Rohrer, Jennifer Schiff, Raluca Viman-Miller, Laurel Wei, Dlynn Williams, Dwight Wilson) are professors at the University of North Georgia (the book's publisher) with expertise in the field of international relations. The book provide students with a framework for independent study, by including an abstract, the learning objectives and a detailed list of references at each chapter, as well as an extensive glossary of concepts at the end of the book.

The first part (*Basics of Global Politics*), including the first two chapters, familiarizes the reader with the main principles, themes, theories and actors of the international relations, which will be deepened in the following parts. The main concepts and the field of study are clarified here: "Within the international system, we refer to global politics as the political processes and interactions that take place among actors seeking to gain power, while international relations is a more general



term which we use to simply define interactions among countries and other international actors. The study of international relations relies on two other important subfields: 1. the study of international security, generally defined as the study of making and breaking war and peace, and 2. international political economy, defined as the economic interactions taking place among actors in regard to trade and finance among nations” (p.8). This part also provides the historical background that has led to the current state of world affairs, summarizing historical events that are significant to the study of international relations, from the Peace of Westphalia to the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States.

The second part (chapters three to five) is dedicated to the main theories of global politics. It introduces students to realism and its variants (classical realism, neorealism, offensive realism, neoclassical realism) in order to understand this oldest theory and its use within the international relations. Then, it discusses the alternative approaches to realism, namely liberalism, the English School, constructivism and poststructuralism, each of them addressing the interaction between state and non-state actors in a unique way. The last chapter of this part examines social and gender theories that question both realism and liberalism, by considering the larger societal and economic constructs that have an impact on different problems. The most dominant of these theories are Marxism and feminism: “While Marxists highlighted the fact that realism and liberalism did not take into account the strong role of the economy as a determinant of both political and societal relations, feminism contended that both of these theories similarly ignored gender” (p. 112). Thus, by expanding the borders of traditional international relations, we gain a broader understanding of global problems.

The third part of the volume (*Global Structures and Processes*), including the next six chapters, examines the foreign policy, state and non-state violence, security and military power, international organizations and law, NGOs and world politics, global and regional governance. The reader is familiarized with the main actors of the foreign policy, with the complexity of building foreign policy process and how states around the world interact to achieve their often-conflicting goals. The topics of war and terrorism are discussed in a distinct chapter, using historical and contemporary examples that fall under these categories of violence. The students are also introduced to the concept of security and its main components, as well as to the most frequent areas of security (military, environmental, economic, political, societal and cyber). International organization based on international cooperation is

an important aspect of international politics. The last chapters of this part discusses the cooperative efforts of international organizations (bodies or agencies such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization- NATO, the World Trade Organization, the International Court of Justice etc.) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to achieve common goals. Among these goals, human security and human rights are of particular importance: “One of the main areas in which international cooperation and international law have had both successes and failures is human security, which is an all-encompassing phrase that refers to the idea that every individual has a right to be protected from systemic violence related to inter- and intra- state conflicts, environmental threats and disasters, and medical crises” (p. 240).

The last part of the book (Part IV: *Globalization and its impact*), including five chapters, considers global trends, challenges and developing identities in international relations. Thus, it discusses the concept of globalization (with its multiple and sometimes opposing perspectives) and the evolution of international economic system since the World War II. The students are introduced to the basic elements of international trade, global finance, monetary policies, as well as to the key actors in international trade, financial and monetary relations. A consistent chapter examines the global environmental issues (water scarcity, resource depletion, pollution, global climate change), the causes and consequences of environmental degradation and the collaborative efforts of international organizations to solve these issues. The United Nations policy targets (Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals) provide a framework for meeting the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century, but they aroused both the criticism of those who argue we need a more profound transformation of the global economic system (“if *development* means growth, it simply cannot be sustainable. The only real path to sustainability, from this perspective, is *degrowth*”- p. 433) and of those who argue that what is required first is the transformation of human consciousness, meaning a radical transformation in how we regard the natural world: “Just as the human species has the technological ability to destroy itself, so also does humanity undoubtedly possess the technological ability to save itself from ecological ruin. Implementing effective solutions will, however, require more than technological know-how. It will require collective action, trust-building, and diplomacy on the part of far-sighted citizens and leaders”. (p. 440)

The comprehensive structure of the book makes it a very useful tool for



anyone wishing to get acquainted with the terminology, actors, challenges, major issues of global politics, especially for students aspiring to pursue careers in international organization, diplomacy, consultancy etc. Beyond the introduction to the main issues of world politics, the book develops critical thinking/perspective on phenomena, processes and decision-making within the international system.