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Book Review: Lexicon of Human Rights

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BOOK REVIEWS

Lexicon of Human Rights; Les Définitions des Droits de L'homme. By Cédric Viale. Leiden;Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008. Pp. x, 518. ISBN 978-90-04-16584-7. 164.00; US\$220.00.

The *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd edition defines a lexicon as “the vocabulary of a . . . branch of knowledge” or, secondarily, “a dictionary.” Cedric Viale, the author, describes his reference book as a “lexicon of useful human rights definitions.” Using the texts listed in *Human Rights, A Compilation of International Instruments*,¹ the author extracted “the most easily understandable definitions” of important terms of human rights law. These definitions are listed in alphabetical order in both English and French. The definitions in English comprise the first half of the book and the French definitions comprise the second half. Each entry includes the term in the other language in brackets and the definition of the term. Following the definitions is a sort of subject index entitled “Human Rights Themes,” which groups each definition under a theme, e.g. “Crime against Humanity.” Following this section is an alphabetical list of the UN human rights documents from which the definitions are extracted. This list includes the date of the document or, in the case of a treaty, the date of signature. However, the list does not contain any further bibliographic information, such as a citation to the United Nations Treaty Series or a United Nations document symbol.

When first opening this reference work, I expected a traditional dictionary focused on human rights. While the book does include such definitions for some of the entries, for others it merely gives a relevant passage that contains the term. For example, under the term “poverty,” this text from the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS follows, “Recognizing that poverty, underdevelopment and illiteracy are among the principal contributing factors to the spread of HIV/AIDS, and noting with grave concern that HIV/AIDS is compounding poverty and is now reversing or impeding development in many countries and should therefore be addressed in an integrated manner.” While this reference may be interesting, the typical researcher would expect a definition of “poverty” rather than a reference to the concept. Similarly, the entry to “racial barriers” states, “Convinced that the existence of racial barriers is repugnant to the ideals of

¹ This UN Sales Publication contains the texts of 94 human rights documents. ISBN 13: 9789211541441; UN Sales Number: 02.XIV.4

any human society.” Again, while this text from the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination mentions racial barriers, it does not define the term.

However, other entries in the lexicon do include a definition. “Informed consent” includes the definition from Principle 11, Consent to Treatment, Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care. The text following “genocide” includes both references to the term in Article 4 of the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice and definitions from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia.

The lexicon appears to be a useful, but incomplete tool, for human rights researchers. While the author has diligently organized extracts related to the terms and phrases in human rights law from the more important UN human rights documents, he has not provided definitions of all the entries included in the book. The diligent researcher will find useful information here, but will likely not be completely satisfied and will turn to additional reference works to locate the needed definitions. Similarly a library seeking a dictionary of human rights terms will not be satisfied with this work alone. Recognizing the limitations of this reference work, I recommend this work for academic libraries with significant international law collections. For those libraries seeking a comprehensive dictionary in the area of human rights, this book alone will not suffice.

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Post-Conflict Administrations in International Law: International Territorial Administration, Transitional Authority, and Foreign Occupation in Theory and Practice. By Eric De Brabandere. Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009. Pp. xvii, 332. ISBN: 978-90-04-17023-0. 104.00; US\$148.00.

In the first sentence of *Post-Conflict Administrations in International Law*, Eric De Brabandere, Assistant Professor of International Law at Leiden University, the Netherlands and author of this book, defines “international administration” as “comprehensive administrative powers ... exercised by, on behalf of or with the agreement of the United Nations.” Although earlier