


Redemption and restoration: The anti-slavery/trafficking call of Christian missions in South Africa today

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This article engages with the religious dimension of the politics of anti-slavery/trafficking and presents an analysis of select Christian-identified organisations working in anti-slavery/trafficking in South Africa. Using website content of the select organisations as primary material, the article argues that in similar ways to the paternalistic early Christian missionary approach to indigenous religious practices, the politics of paternalism persist to this day in the realm of Christian organisations working in anti-slavery in South Africa. That is, the 'White Saviour Industrial Complex' identified by Teju Cole is pervasive in the rhetoric of these Christian organisations. Consequently, and firstly, the article further bolsters the argument that the African continent has frequently been treated as a key site for formulating and testing a variety of models of humanitarian assistance, aid and economic development dating from the colonial era to the present neocolonial one. However, and secondly, the article also highlights that there is ambivalence in the ways in which the Christian anti-slavery/trafficking organisations in South Africa take up a key feminist concept of empowerment as informing how they understand their work. As such, the article proposes that caution be applied in critically engaging the discourse of these organisations.

Contribution: This article engages with the religious dimension of the politics of anti-slavery/trafficking and presents an analysis of select Christian-identified organisations working in anti-slavery/trafficking in South Africa. The article illustrates how the intersection of political studies and religion is part of the journal's focus on interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary contested discourse.

Keywords: anti-trafficking; anti-slavery; Christianity; paternalism; redemption; restoration; South Africa.

Introduction

On 02 December 2014 representatives of a number of the world's major religious traditions came together at the Vatican to sign a common declaration, condemning modern-day slavery and urging the world to act in unison to fight this 'crime against humanity' (Endslavery 2014:n.p.). The declaration was signed by a number of prominent religious leaders that included Pope Francis (representing the Catholic Church), Patriarch Bartholomew (representing the Orthodox Church), Chief Rabbi David Rosen (representing the Jewish traditions), Grand Imam of Al-Azhar (representing Muslim traditions) and Datuk K. Sri Dhammaratana (representing Buddhism). The event was organised under the auspices of the *Global Freedom Network*, an organisation dedicated to eradicating human trafficking, and was touted as a key milestone in the modern anti-slavery circles because of the involvement of religious organisations in the effort. A key aspect of the declaration was the claim that religions, referred to as faith communities in the document, have an important role to play in the eradication of modern slavery.

The 2014 declaration was not the first time that religious communities expressed their interest in playing a prominent role against modern-day slavery/trafficking on a global scale. For example, on 05 October 2007 in Cape Town, South Africa, an Interfaith Declaration against Human Trafficking was adopted by a forum of high-level religious leaders. The forum was organised under the auspices of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN. GIFT) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The signatories to the declaration committed themselves to a: 'Rational, holistic, integrative, rights-based plan of action; Supplemented with practice, cost-effective strategies and; Needs-based programmes and projects to combat human trafficking and support victims of human trafficking' (UN. GIFT 2008:30). In signing the declaration, the various religious leaders affirmed that religions, broadly construed, have an important role to play in the global fight against modern-day slavery and anti-trafficking.

Although drawing parallels with the broader global discourse on paternalism and anti-slavery/trafficking discourse, the article limits its analysis to South Africa for a number of reasons. Firstly, in South Africa, there has been little work carried out on the role of religion in the modern-day anti-slavery-trafficking context. Secondly, generally speaking, regarded as a 'primary destination for trafficked persons in the Southern African region and within Africa at large', including 'trafficking towards Europe and North America' (UNODC 2019:n.p.), South Africa provides a useful context for examining what has transpired in the general intersection of Christianity and modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking field in Africa. Thirdly, as the UNODC further observes, within South Africa, 'girls are trafficked from rural to urban areas for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, while boys are forced to work in street vending, begging, agriculture, mining, and criminal activities' (UNODC 2019:n.p.). Therefore, as part of the global anti-slavery/trafficking response to modern-day slavery, South Africa has put in place some major legislative protocols. For example, on 25 April 2019, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development launched the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons National Policy Framework (NPF). The NPF is aimed at supporting the implementation of the already existing *Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons, 2013* (Act No. 7 of 2013). Consequently, it is clear that, in line with a global response, South Africa has assumed a pivotal role in the efforts aimed at combating modern-day slavery/trafficking.

In fact, these two initiatives noted above are part of a larger anti-slavery/trafficking discourse in the country that also includes civil society, and especially religion-based organisations. Given the role that religious organisations have played in Africa in general as part of civil society, it should not be surprising that this role has been extended to the arena of modern-day slavery and trafficking (Beyers 2011; Ighobor 2016; Obadare 2007; Simmie 2017). Consequently, the article proffers some observations on a number of interrelated questions regarding the role that religion-based organisations in the field of anti-trafficking/slavery have set for themselves. Firstly, how does the profession of Christian religious faith relate to different forms of anti-slavery, aid and development praxis within the organisations analysed? Secondly, how do attitudes towards notions of redemption and restoration of contemporary Christian organisations working on anti-slavery/trafficking in South Africa affect the politics of paternalism in general? Thirdly, in what ways do these organisations draw on the feminist concept of empowerment in ways that affirm their Christian ethos?

In answer to these questions, the article argues that, as opposed to a straightforwardly paternalistic attitude, there is an ambivalence in the anti-trafficking narratives of restoration highlighted by the anti-slavery/trafficking organisations in South Africa. On the one hand, restoration is valorised as a basic human right informed by 'universal' and humanistic Christian ethics of restoring dignity. On the other hand, however, restoration is not accorded a multiple or even

indigenous source, but located solely in the salvific discourse of a Euro-Christian evangelistic ethic that continues in the long established paternalistic path of saving the African 'slave' from self-destruction. Such ambivalence raises questions regarding the role of faith-based anti-slavery/trafficking organisations working within a primarily secular legal framework of the global modern-day anti-slavery movement.¹ In other words, given this ambivalence, it behoves us to investigate further how such ambivalence appears and what positive implications it might have for our understanding of the impact of the Christian ethos of the select organisations.

Method of analysis

In engaging observations regarding the Christian religious dimension of the politics of modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking in South Africa, the article presents an analysis of the website content of select Christian-identified organisations working in this area in the country. Specifically, the article focusses on the activities, aims, missions and visions of the organisations and takes these to be adequate in formulating a broad understanding of the organisations concerned. The list of organisations that are examined is limited to the following: *Embrace Dignity*, *Domino Foundation Red Light*, *Hope for Women* (recently changed to *Hope Risen Foundation*), *S-CAPE* and *STOP* (*Stop Trafficking of People*). There are two other organisations that can also be said to fit the concern of this article, viz. looking at anti-slavery/trafficking movements and their appeal to religion in South Africa, *Christian Action* and the *Salvation Army*. However, these organisations are not engaged in the current discussion. This is primarily because all the other organisations that are analysed in this article are specifically dedicated to trafficking and are home-grown, whereas the latter set of organisations have a broader agenda within which trafficking is one of the many foci. Granted, the *Domino Foundation Red Light* is also a programme within a broader Foundation, but the specificity and resource allocation with which trafficking is treated within the Foundation's programmes warrant that it be included on its own in the list of organisations that deal specifically with anti-trafficking. The further reason for limiting analysis to the first set of organisations is to provide for a more detailed comparative analysis in terms of the broad theme of examining how these organisations deal with the key themes of redemption and restoration through a specifically Christian religious lens.

In addition, the limitations of relying on website content analysis without other supplementary qualitative data are noted. However, for the purposes of this article, the web content is sufficient. That is, the article is not ethnographic as it is not interested in the phenomenological aspects of meaning-making process of survivors or leaders of these organisations, but is concerned with the ways in which these organisations use the language of Christianity to frame the work that they do. To that end, the article analyses the

¹For a similar argument in the context of the United States of America, see Harrelson (2010).

web content as a socio-cultural text by describing and exploring the content from a qualitative perspective to uncover underlying meanings and significance (Gibson n.d.; Salkind 2010). In particular, and given that all the organisations analysed include information such as policies and strategies on their websites rather than in hard-copy documents, such information can be treated as any other form of qualitative data, but obviously with the acknowledgement of limitations (Baines 2017; Kim & Kuljis 2010).

So, in conducting qualitative analysis of relevant website content, the article takes it for granted that this material is the same as that available through print. In fact, in the case of STOP, for example, all the information about the organisation is only available on its website. In the case of S-CAPE, the information available on brochures was the same as that available on the organisation's website. Of course, this is not to deny that a richer understanding of the organisation's values and vision could not be better garnered through traditional methods such as interviews. However, in the digital age, we need to take web content as serious anthropological artefacts that can tell us a lot about its creators in both local and global contexts. Consequently, to further situate the work these South African organisations perform, it is important to highlight how they fit within a broader global context as this will help guide how the article engages with them theoretically as well.

Global religious context

For Mary Graw Leary, it makes sense that religious organisations should be part of the global and local fight against human trafficking. This is because:

[T]he features of modern-day slavery – global, local, and universal in case – require an opponent with equally strong global and local ties, as well as a deep presence and longstanding work on the issues that cause human trafficking. (Leary 2018:59)

In fact, according to Maurice Middleberg (2016), Executive Director of *Free the Slaves*:

[M]any of history's great civil rights advancements have been started and nurtured by religious leaders and activists. This is also true of the anti-slavery movement. Ending slavery unites all faiths and no twisting of texts can obscure that fact. That is why faith leaders are at the forefront of the effort to eradicate modern slavery. (n.p.)

Middleberg goes further in the article to highlight both the ideological and practical ways in which Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism all demonstrate a strong commitment against slavery, including modern-day slavery.

In the case of Christianity, which is the religion of focus in this article, Middleberg (2016) notes that:

[C]hristian abolitionism took root in the 17th century. In England, prominent Anglicans joined forces with Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists and other faith groups to form the world's first anti-slavery movement. Together, they forged a moral consensus to ban the trans-Atlantic slave trade and then outlaw slavery itself throughout the British Empire. (n.p.)

Joel Quirk and David Richardson (2010) further affirm this position when noting that the vibrancy of political action against slavery in Britain from the 1780s has generally been attributed to Quakers and evangelical Christians of different theological persuasion. According to this view, we should not be surprised that Christians today across the world continue this fight against modern forms of slavery.

Indeed, if one looks at the amount of popular religious discourse touting the anti-slavery narrative, it is easy to see how the sentiment regarding the centrality of Christian morality to the anti-trafficking narrative rings true. For example, the First Annual Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking in 2009 at the University of Nebraska had a panel on Religious Conviction and Human Trafficking. The panellists highlighted the issue of agency and respected that agency in the context of intervention (Adams et al. 2009:n.p.). In 2015, Sebastien Maillard (2015), Rome correspondent of the French daily *La Croix*, highlighted in his piece how 'A last important feature of this new kind of interreligious cooperation is that it is meant to be widespread and not to remain at elitist level' (n.p.). Maillard's piece points to the ways in which Christian anti-slavery/trafficking discourse is being taken up at the level of not only abstract theology, but also lay practice.

Furthermore, Katherine Marshall (2017), Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue, notes in her piece on the Istanbul Forum held in 2017 that:

[T]he Istanbul Forum brought together about 60 people, most from the Orthodox and Anglican communities but also some scholars and practitioners. Positively, the moral imperative to address slavery was framed in a history of advocacy and action. (n.p.)

Representing the Catholic Church perspective on the matter, Leary (2015) notes that:

[A] long standing actor against human trafficking has been religions and religious organizations ... The reality is that religions have been successfully produced results in prevention, protection, and partnership approached to human trafficking and any organization interested in human trafficking will respond to these results. (p. 10)

In other words, because of their focus on the dignity of the person, religions are well positioned to link this concern with the international human rights discourse focussed on trafficked individuals (3).²

The article highlights this global context to challenge the supposed exceptionalism of the South African context as particularly religious. That is, the South African organisations analysed herein function within a broader global and

²See also Potrafke (2016). In this article, Niklas Potrafke, through an analysis of anti-trafficking policy indices, demonstrates how countries with Christian majorities implement stricter anti-trafficking policies in general. See also Vanderhurst (2017). In this article, Stacey Vanderhurst demonstrates, through ethnographic research, how the use of the religious idioms of both conversion and salvation by shelter staff and would-be migrant women results in their ability to make claims on the state to act morally with respect to trafficking. For a more theologically infused argument in the same vein, see The Clewer Initiative, *We See You: A Theology of Modern Slavery*.

international network of Christian-based anti-slavery/trafficking movements. It is important to highlight this point above as it will be important to recall later in relation to the notion of paternalism and how this paternalism functions in particularly 'western' ways that have been imported through a longer history of Christian redemption and restoration narratives in Africa. In fact, in highlighting human trafficking as an especially troubling issue, the UNODC and UN.GIFT draw on the story of the South African Griqua woman, Saarah/Saartjie Baartmaan, to foreground their report and the need to act in global concert against modern-day slavery/trafficking (UN. GIFT 2008:1). In so doing, focus is drawn to the *universalised* moralistic foundation that informs the modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking discourse, and on the basis of which, arguably, South Africa continues to serve as an example in similar ways to its post-apartheid reconciliation miracle narrative.

Theory

To further fully appreciate the broader context within which the anti-slavery/trafficking organisations in South Africa function, it is useful to consider how religion-based anti-slavery/trafficking organisations have been generally construed. To this end, Cameron Conaway (2013) provides a useful typology of the ways in which religion-based anti-slavery movements can be categorised. Conaway (2013) observes that:

[T]he most cursory glance at websites of organizations working to combat human trafficking will make one thing clear: the role of religion plays a vital role. Some groups place their religious beliefs front and center; some prefer to call themselves 'faith-based.' Some groups subtly lace the language of their mission with their particular denomination; some make it clear that they are 'non-religious.' Every group working in the anti-slavery sector has made a conscious decision about (1) what their religious affiliations are or are not and (2) what this means in terms of their brand. (n.p.)

Consequently, as will be illustrated below through qualitative content analysis, the South African organisations analysed in this article also adhere to the thesis of the ubiquity of religion by centring Christian religious beliefs. Moreover, these organisations either lace their mission statements and visions with clear religious language or subtly insert such language through generic references to notions of dignity, restoration and redemption. As such, the primacy placed on Christian values as foundational to the organisations' visions and aims means that they fulfil the typology proposed by Conaway.

Moreover, Siobhán McGrath and Samantha Watson (2018) have recently presented a convincing analysis of how the current discourse of anti-slavery has taken on a development character, thus perpetuating what they call a global politics of rescue (McGrath & Watson 2018). The hyper-visibility of such paternalism gives further impetus to Teju Cole's (2012) observation regarding the persistence of the 'White Savoir Industrial Complex' with respect to Africa. Cole's critique requires that scholars in the field of anti-trafficking/slavery

today pay attention to the salient ways in which such Christian religious paternalism frames the modern-day global anti-slavery/trafficking narratives.

In the context of the United States of America, Yvonne Zimmerman (2011, 2012) has highlighted how American anti-trafficking initiatives are limited in their ability to promote a diverse notion of freedom because freedom in this context is framed through a narrow Christian moral view. As a result, at least according to Zimmerman, the agency of victims/survivors becomes subsumed under the moral prowess of the Protestant American values and victims/survivors are limited in their capacity to exercise agency with respect to how they envision their freedom. In other words, whilst not as obvious as the paternalism of old Puritan America, the modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking discourse, according to Zimmerman, normalises male aggression and female passivity. Such passivity requires, as a result, a strong man defender, and this is where the Christian right enters in defence of the rights of the weak and justifies the paternalism of anti-slavery/trafficking organisations.

That the African continent has frequently been treated as a key site for formulating and testing a variety of models of humanitarian assistance, aid and economic development dating from the colonial era to the present is a familiar argument. These models have a long and contentious history on the continent that includes European colonial rule, European Christian missionary work and modern European Development. All these have played a significant role in the so-called humanitarian, developmental and civilising missions targeted at the African continent. In contextualising this argument for the contemporary era, and using anti-slavery/trafficking organisations as an example, the article argues that the incessant politics of religious paternalism in particular remain visible in the various contemporary political development and humanitarian projects of modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking missions. That is, the paternalism towards Africans continues despite the varied and mostly positive reception of Christianity by Africans themselves and despite the complex picture of religiosity in the continent. Put differently, the experiences of African conversions and the emergence of African independent churches notwithstanding, and most recently seen in the proliferation of Pentecostal and Evangelical home-grown forms of Christianity, religious paternalism in the realm of the anti-slavery/trafficking praxis continues. The next sections of the article demonstrate this paternalism in the specific organisations working in South Africa and also highlight the ambivalence alluded to already.

Embrace dignity – 'Fighting against the oppression of women'

Embrace Dignity (2016) is a South African NGO based in Cape Town that was founded in 2010. According to its website, the organisation:

opened its doors with the purpose of empowering prostituted people ... and creating a legal and social environment that would

support them and increase their options to exit rather than criminalise and stigmatise already victimized people. (n.p.)

It was founded by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge (a former Deputy Minister of Health and Defence) and Jeremy Routledge (a former Director of the Quaker Peace Centre). Embrace Dignity provides support to those who wish to 'exit prostitution' through referrals for counselling, skills training, small-business development, supporting survivor initiatives and building a survivor network. The organisation achieves the above through its advocacy for law reform, public education and Exit Programme. Specifically, the organisation's 'Exit Programme empowers survivors through various interventions that develop their emotional and vocational skills and help them become self-reliant' (n.p.).

The organisation's values are founded on the belief that 'all people have inherent dignity and deserve to live lives free from exploitation'. That is, the organisation sees itself as working towards a society that 'does not exploit and oppress any human being based on their economic status, social exclusion or marginalisation' (n.p.). Furthermore, Embrace Dignity's (2016) values are hallowed in its vision to:

[C]ontribute to a South African society that embraces the dignity of all people as enshrined in our Constitution and opposes commercial and sexual exploitation of those made powerless and vulnerable by poverty or the absence of choice. We envision a society where law reform is used to reduce demand and supply of prostitution, government support is provided to empower survivors with skills to transform their lives and where public attitudes concerning prostitution are based on a proper understanding of the various ways in which people become prostituted or trafficked (n.p.).

In fact, according to Embrace Dignity (2016):

[W]hile women in the industry experience different degrees of abuse, coercion and violence, all of them are physically and psychologically harmed. There is no denying that prostitution and trafficking are intertwined, based on the commodification and objectification of human beings and sex. (n.p.)

Consequently, it is these commodification and objectification that lead to loss of dignity for the 'prostituted' women, and it is this dignity that the organisation seeks to restore.

Interestingly, the organisation takes a structural approach to sex-trafficking by emphasising the notion of inequality based on the intersection of gender, class and race as significant factors that contribute 'to the oppression of vulnerable people through prostitution, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse' (n.p.). In response to such inequality, Embrace Dignity (2016) focusses on a three-pronged approach to fulfilling its mission:

Advocating and achieving law and policy reforms that decriminalise the victim and address the demand by criminalising the purchaser; shifting public attitudes from the blame of prostituted women and girls, towards an understanding of the conditions that lead to their vulnerability, a recognition of their inherent dignity and an improved public awareness of the harms

and oppression of prostitution and; providing and campaigning for increased employment options for prostituted persons with the aim of enabling their exit from prostitution and therefore reducing the harms they are exposed to. (n.p.)

In other words, Embrace Dignity's approach foregrounds structural change as integral in the process of being able to change the lives of the individual women whom they target. In Christian terms, this view amounts to seeing the women not only as individuals, but as part of a greater whole or the kingdom of God – a structure that transcends their individual identities. Such an approach to transformation finds its clearest articulation in the feminist discourses of empowerment that have had an impact on the field of Development Studies from which much of the discourse on anti-slavery/trafficking draws its praxis orientation. That is to say, if 'A feminist approach to trafficking must be one that focuses on empowering people, not just protecting or rescuing them' (Baker 2013:n.p.), then *Embrace Dignity* demonstrates a certain sense of the ambivalence of religion in being able to affirm paternalism whilst advocating for empowerment.

Domino foundation red light

On the organisation's website, the Domino Foundation (2016) describes its vision for the *Red Light Anti-Human Trafficking* programme as being:

[T]o reach out, restore and release survivors of exploitation and Human Trafficking. We aim to equip and empower individuals spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively to be able to fulfil their purpose and destiny. (n.p.)

This vision is enacted in a two-stage process, with the first stage comprising identifying 'sex-trafficked survivors and vulnerable groups and to refer individuals into a restoration programme, either with Red Light or network partners' (n.p.). Domino Foundation's (2016) second stage:

[O]f the programme's operations is to restore individuals to health and wholeness through individualised and group rehabilitation programmes. When that has been achieved, the survivors are released and supported through our reintegration programme, which ensures they have the confidence, knowledge, skills and tools required to seek employment. (n.p.)

To the end of achieving the goals of the two stages, the Red Light programme places a clear and strong emphasis on the argument that its programmes 'are centered in LOVE and the word of God to release our beneficiaries into sustainable lives of FREEDOM and HOPE [sic]' (n.p.). These goals are achieved, specifically, through the activities of awareness-raising using 'presentations to schools, corporates, interest groups and churches form our prevention initiatives' (n.p.). The second activity is reaching out 'to sex workers and vulnerable groups in areas of high prostitution and exploitation', whilst the third stage of Domino Foundation (2016) is restoring – where:

[A]t the heart of our restoration programme is the desire to see individuals restored to health and wholeness, regain hope and dignity and to walk with purpose and a destiny. (n.p.)

By using 'individualised rehabilitation programmes and extensive individual and group therapy', the hope of the organisation is that 'survivors' can be released into a life of 'economic freedom and be reintegrated into society' (n.p.).

Unlike *Embrace Dignity*, which proffers some recognition and acknowledgement of structural forces at play, the *Domino Foundation Red Light* programme prioritises the 'rescue the individual' paradigm. This case in point is reiterated in the organisation's principles of reaching out and assisting 'survivors of human trafficking and exploited sex workers who feel they cannot exit the industry due to social and economic circumstances' (n.p.). That is, whilst the Red Light programme situates trafficking within a broader socio-economic context of inequality, its response is, nonetheless, framed by an understanding that survivors are weak to counter the powerful traffickers and it is the role of the *Foundation* to rescue these women from such powerful forces.

Domino Foundation's (2016) view of rescue is specifically framed by the biblical verse that is foregrounded on the organisation's website, which reads as follows:

[T]he Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners – Isaiah 61:1. (n.p.)

That is, the organisation views itself as fulfilling a mission of freeing 'the captives' who otherwise have no means of freeing themselves. At the core of the organisation's belief can be said to lie the assumption that 'restored' survivors who are 'released' back into the world would have been transformed enough to be able to resist the structural impediments that led them to the trafficking context in the first place. In other words, as a transformed being, the individual who undergoes the *Red Light* programme of 'restoration' will become a self-sustaining and contributing member of society. This is a point reiterated by using the organisation's website section entitled 'Stories', where narratives of individual cases of women (Thuli and Hope) who have been through the programmes are highlighted to underscore the organisation's success in its restorative work (n.p.).

Hope for women (aka Hope Risen Foundation) – 'Fight for hope'

Also founded in 2009, *Hope for Women* (2017) is an anti-trafficking organisation whose vision is:

[T]o end human trafficking and bring restoration to survivors through awareness and prevention initiatives, which are carried out alongside direct interventions to rescue, restore and reintegrate those who have fallen prey to the horrors of trafficking. (n.p.)

The organisation achieves this vision through three activities in particular. First, through 'awareness and prevention' by educating (Hope for Women 2017):

[T]he public on the inner-workings of this industry, both to arm people with the knowledge that can protect them from this fate, and to dismantle the systems that drive trafficking. (n.p.)

This awareness-raising is promoted through public events, training sessions, speaking engagements and documentary screenings. A second key aspect of *Hope for Women's* (2017) vision is 'rescue and restoration', which is achieved primarily through cooperation with:

[I]nvestigators, forensic specialists, social workers, police officers, law enforcement and partner organisations, whom together form part of a rapid response unit, and conduct ongoing investigations into possible trafficking cases. (n.p.)

The third aspect of the organisation's vision is empowerment. According to *Hope for Women's* (2017) website:

[O]nce out of danger and in Safe Houses, the survivors are taken through an extended programme to bring healing and hope, while equipping them on a practical level for reintegration and life after the Safe House. (n.p.)

This third aspect of *Hope for Women's* (2017) activities is achieved through a coordinated effort of:

[T]rained and experienced counsellors, social workers and professionals work with the survivors through this journey. They are provided with trauma counselling and therapy, and guided towards rediscovery of their value, autonomy and purpose. (n.p.)

In a similar fashion to *Red Light* above, it is the organisation's aim to equip 'survivors' 'on a practical level for reintegration and life after the Safe House' (n.p.).

Furthermore, whilst much of its self-presentation is not overtly religious, for example, the general discourse of *Hope for Women* is, nonetheless, heavily invested in the rescue narrative framed by the salvific Christian message. The most blatant demonstration of this investment is in the organisation's vision, where the statement makes reference to: 'direct interventions to rescue, restore and reintegrate those who have fallen prey to the horrors of trafficking' (n.p.). The construction of those rescued, restored and reintegrated primarily as 'prey' who have no agency in the context of trafficking reiterates the missionary narrative highlighted above that is very paternalistic towards the victims.

In fact, in *Hope for Women's* (2017) prayer, quoted below, the organisation makes this slave, sinners and rescuers trope even more apparent:

[F]ather, we thank you for your incredible love, care and compassion for us all. Thank you for sending your one and only precious son, Jesus Christ, to seek and save the lost. Thank you that He came to set us free and to give us life and life in abundance! That is Your Heart and Your Plan for all of us, Lord, but there are so many, whose freedom have[sic] been taken away from them. Lord, we cry to You on their behalf and we stand in the gap in praying for them. We want to team up with You Lord. We want to see all those in bondage, set free, healed and restored - physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually - able to

live the abundant life that You offer us and be filled with hope. We pray in the mighty name of Jesus, help us Lord, for Your Kingdom's sake, Amen. (n.p.)

In particular, the masculine references to G/god, complete with the references to those 'whose freedom have[sic] been taken away' and on whose behalf the organisation stands, construct the victims/survivors as weak and less than capable subjects who are unable to make decisions in this context (n.p.).

According to this prayer, the women are slaves who have fallen in the hands of the sinning traffickers, and it is the role of *Hope for Women* to rescue them as part of their calling to help those who are helpless. In highlighting this paternalistic language, the point is not to undermine the work that such an organisation does, but to demonstrate how religious-based organisations sometimes get the problem of trafficking wrong by concentrating on rescuing individuals and failing to also grasp the social and economic forces that drive people into slavery/trafficking situations (Erasmus 2013:n.p.). That said, it is not to paint the organisations with the same brush as there are those who are quite intentional about linking the individual rescue efforts to the broader economic and socio-political structural contexts.

S-CAPE – 'Restoration from exploitation'

S-CAPE was founded in 2010 in Cape Town by Miryam Cherpillod, originally from Switzerland, and defines itself as a faith-based, non-profit organisation. The organisation prides itself in its diversity of 'staff and volunteers who come from different continents, cultures, and backgrounds on a common mission to bring restoration to victims of human trafficking' (n.p.). According to the organisation's website (S-CAPE 2010), Cherpillod moved to South Africa when:

God had given her a clear calling to reach out to women and girls in prostitution. Following a seminar on 'Assisting victims of Human Trafficking', and realizing that so many people were forced to sell their bodies, she was grasped by conviction that this was the very thing she needed to focus on! Since then, she has worked faithfully and courageously as she's followed God on this beautiful adventure He's called her on. (n.p.)

It is clear from the foregrounding of the particular founding narrative above that S-CAPE sees itself as on a special Christian mission of saving trafficked women in South Africa.

Moreover, S-CAPE describes itself as 'a safe home that desires to bring holistic restoration to women coming out of human trafficking and exploitation by providing victims with physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual care' (n.p.). To that end, the organisation's vision and mission are captured by the acronym S-CAPE, which stands for: Serving, Caring, Acting, Praying and Empowering. Moreover, these actions are premised on following the command of specific biblical verses. These are biblical verses that specifically highlight the acts of Serving (Mk 10:45), Caring (Mt 9:36), Acting (Ja 2:16-17), Praying (1 Tm 2:1) and Empowering

(Mt 28:19). Specifically, in terms of the Conaway (2013) typology highlighted earlier, S-CAPE is a Christian organisation that centres itself squarely on a Christian understanding of what it is doing in the anti-trafficking/slavery context.

As noted already, S-CAPE's narrative is framed specifically by a biblical mandate of serving, caring, acting, praying and empowering where each of these elements has biblical verses associated with them. S-CAPE's construction of the slaves, sinners and saviours trope is through two very paternalistic narratives. The first is a reference to the founder's narrative, which follows a typical missionary trajectory of being called to serve (S-CAPE 2010):

[M]iryam Cherpillod, originally from Switzerland, moved to South Africa with YWAM in 2005. God had given her a clear calling to reach out to women and girls in prostitution. Following a seminar on 'Assisting victims of Human Trafficking', and realizing that so many people were forced to sell their bodies, she was grasped by conviction that this was the very thing she needed to focus on! Since then, she has worked faithfully and courageously as she's followed God on this beautiful adventure He's called her on. (n.p.)

The idea, however noble, that one is 'called' to serve from the affluent North in the needy South plays too easily into the paternalistic attitude that one is acting on behalf of those who are considered needy because it is in their best interest for one to do so.

Such a paternalistic attitude is especially evident in the organisation's choice of the Harriet Tubman quote 'I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves' (n.p.) as a foregrounding statement on the organisation's website. Although proven to be not true, the statement has nonetheless gained traction in certain political circles in terms of highlighting the idea that in order for oppressed groups to rise up, they have to know that they are oppressed. That is, by framing its mission as educating those who do not know that they are oppressed, the organisation assumes a paternalistic attitude of 'rescuing the slave' despite the identity of the saviour being female rather than male. Of course, there is the possibility of readings S-CAPE's narrative, including those of the other organisations, through the lens of positive consciousness-raising. However, given the blatantly unequal power relations at play in the rescue discourses of these organisations, it is difficult to defend this particular line of thinking.

STOP – 'Together for freedom'!

On its website, *Stop Trafficking of People* defines itself as a 'non-profit Christian organisation that exists to combat all aspects of human trafficking within South Africa and the rest of Africa' through advocacy, awareness raising and victim support (STOP 2019:n.p.). Through its advocacy work, STOP (2019) aims to:

[!]influence decision makers in South Africa and the rest of Africa, to act within their sphere of influence, in ways that contribute to the reduction of human trafficking, prostitution, pornography and sexual abuse. (n.p.)

Furthermore, the organisation aims to 'raise awareness of Human Trafficking across Africa in order to educate and protect vulnerable communities' (n.p.). Lastly, the organisation's aim of supporting and restoring victims is realised through its 'support of independent shelters' (n.p.).

In the section on its website entitled 'HOW WE DO IT', *STOP* lists a number of activities in which it engages to support its mission. These include intercession[sic], street outreach, safe house assistance, victim intervention, primary and high school presentations, workshops, conferences, rural outreach, media campaigns and provision of resources for activism amongst others (n.p.). That is, similar to other Christian anti-trafficking organisations in South Africa, *STOP* focusses on education campaigns, rehabilitation and integration of 'survivors' into broader society. To that end, it should be noted how the rescue praxis of this organisation is framed by a particular understanding of Christian redemption that privileges the trope of slaves, sinners and rescuers – that is, a trope that foregrounds a paternalistic approach.

For example, whilst *STOP* lists a number of activities that it uses to engage its mission and vision, the first on the list is 'intercession[sic]' (n.p.). Intercessory prayer refers to a type of Christian prayer done on behalf of others. In most cases, the intercession is done for those who cannot pray for themselves or are seen to be weak to accomplish such a task in any meaningful way. As such, the assumption of intercessory prayer is that the one on behalf of whom one is interceding is weak or unable to do so and, therefore, in need of a stand-in or buffer. Therefore, in listing intercession as a main activity against trafficking, *STOP* is then able to centre itself as the rescuer that prays for the weak slaves who, otherwise, cannot save themselves. This rescue narrative in *STOP* is further buttressed by the choice of mostly children as the face of the organisation's promotional material. As the signifiers of weakness *par excellence*, children are invoked in this particular context to foreground the need for intervention as a Christian obligation without bounds.

Redemption and restoration as sites of ambivalence

In reading through the web promotional material of these organisations, as per preceding discussion, various themes emerge. In particular, two key concepts crop up repeatedly in relation to the organisations' specifically Christian discourse on working to end modern-day slavery/trafficking in South Africa. These are the notions of redemption and restoration. Whilst these organisations are generally concerned with advocacy, raising awareness and building empowerment, entangled within these 'noble' concerns are the more complex notions of redemption and restoration. Such entanglement is visible in the noble goal of restoring the human dignity of the 'victims/survivors' that is also a key feature of the global antislavery discourse in general (Zimmerman 2011:573). The link between the local iteration and the global prevalence of these two concepts, including the good intentions behind their use, highlights the ambivalent aspects of Christian

religious discourse for the modern-day anti-trafficking/slavery movements.

Redemption and restoration: The Colonial Christian legacy of rescue

On the one hand, these organisations stress the notions of 'victim/survivor' empowerment (redemption) by promoting skills development and self-reliance. On the other hand, by relying on a narrative of restoration that is informed by a Christian discourse of salvation, these organisations can be said to be heavily invested in what Julia O'Connell Davidson (2005) describes as a narrative of 'slaves, sinners and saviors' (4). In fact, according to Carrie Baker (2013), this particular narrative is a common one in the modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking discourse in general, where, as she specifically argues, these organisations' rhetoric of redemption can easily lead to a path of 'using a common, gendered rescue narrative: a heroic rescuer saves an innocent and helpless female victim from a cruel trafficker' (2). Whilst Baker is right to point out that this rescue narrative 'relies heavily on patriarchal and orientalist tropes of passive, ignorant, or backward women and girls who are trafficked and of their powerful and/or enlightened male rescuers', her analysis misses another key element in this narrative, namely religion (2).

As a colonial missionary religion (not that this is its sole identity), Christianity has relied heavily on the paternalistic narrative of saving the natives. As Viera Pawlikova-Vilhanova (2007) rightly notes:

[T]he task of leading Africans on the path of civilization by the expansion of moral and religious instruction and converting the pagans to the true religion fell on newly established mission societies. (p. 253)

Moreover, the 'missionary movement in Africa, which continued throughout the nineteenth century up to present day' and may be 'dated from 1792 and the publication of William Carey's *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens*', was regarded as 'a landmark in Christian history' (p. 250). That is to say, 'The expansion of the missionary movement into Africa was part of the growing conception of Christian responsibility for the regeneration of African peoples' (p. 252). Furthermore, as Pawlikova-Vilhanova attests, anti-slavery and humanitarian concerns also played a vital role in stimulating European interest in Africa and gave an impetus to mission work' (p. 252). In this sense, the opening up of Africa through 'the imposition of the so-called legitimate commerce and Christianity' as means to civilisation 'was seen by most abolitionists, humanitarians, philanthropists and missionaries as the only remedy' to the malady of paganism (p. 252).

It is indeed important to think of Christian missions as 'a process of transformation that occurred on multiple planes' and, as such, arguably a process of both 'subjective transformation and social affirmation' (Gerbner 2015:142). Equally, it is also important to affirm with Francis Schussler Fiorenza (1994) that 'Christian theology faces not only the

will to power of its beliefs ... but also the implicit assumption of the superiority of Western and Christian culture' (p. 276). In other words, the objective of saving souls, especially one premised on the 'interpretation of the meaning of the Christian faith in Christ as redeemer and savior', is heavily laden with notions of religious, cultural, social and political superiority (p. 277). In this sense, as Schussler Fiorenza further argues, 'Since Christian ideals and practices are not exempt from the permeation of power, Christians need to explicate the meaning of redemption as a belief and practice' (p. 275). That is, redemption and restoration are not innocent signifiers, but articulate a specific power relation of paternalistic domination.

Indeed, what, instead, the preceding analysis highlights is the way in which a common narrative of Christian paternalism is evident in the various discourses of the anti-slavery/trafficking organisations examined in South Africa. However, this common narrative of redemption and restoration is one that also draws on ideas of empowerment as central to the work that these organisations do. Whilst I have pointed to the paternalism that runs through the discourse of these organisations, it is also important to point to how such paternalism is inflected with a sense of empowering the women in question. Specifically, as argued in the next section, there is a palpable fluidity in these organisations' discourses in South Africa between a classical missionary approach of straight paternalism and one that also foreground agency.

Empowerment and the feminist politics of modern-day Christian abolitionism

The first key thing to note is that the theme of empowerment appears in all the organisations' discourses. Indeed, whilst the concept of empowerment is fuzzy, unclear and contested (Mosedale 2014), it has still been deemed useful by feminist theorists and activists as a transformative tool for linking individual consciousness and collective transformation (Cornwall & Anyidoho 2010:148). As Amy Allen (2016) notes in her extensive discussion of feminist perspectives on power, a significant strand of feminist theorising on power starts with the contention that the conception of power as power-over, domination or control is implicitly masculinist. Consequently, to avoid such masculinist connotations, many feminist theorists have argued for a reconceptualisation of power as a capacity or ability, specifically, the capacity to empower or transform oneself and others. Thus, these theorists have tended to understand power not as power-over but as power-to.

Moreover, the conception of power as transformative and empowering is most notable in the rejection of the command-obedience model of power and definition of power as, to quote Hannah Arendt (1970:44), 'the human ability not just to act but to act in concert'. Arendt's definition highlights the focus on community or collective empowerment and for this reason, it is significant to note that the theme of power as capacity or empowerment has been so

prominent in the work of women who have written about power (Allen 2016:n.p.). In other words, as pointed out earlier in the article, such a focus on empowerment within the modern-day anti-trafficking/slavery organisations illustrates the impact of feminist discourses on such organisations such that their approaches to their missionary aims, whilst paternalistic, are also imbued with a sense of empowering the women being 'rescued'. In this sense, we have to ask whether this concern with empowerment has also a religious source through the notions of redemption and restoration as taken up by the organisations under examination.

In ways that are similar to how the liberal notions of fraternity, liberty and justice for the early abolitionists were linked to biblical concepts of brotherhood, liberty, benevolence and judgement (Coffey 2006), notions of redemption and restoration as Christian concepts are currently used for the purposes of empowerment in the discourses of the modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking organisations in South Africa. For example, in using the motto with the subtitle 'Restoration from Exploitation: Safety. Restoration. Equipping. Empowering', *S-CAPE* demonstrates a linear understanding of psychological development for the women who go through their programme, where the understanding is that they will move from insecurity to empowerment (*S-CAPE* 2010:n.p.). Whilst reading this linear development narrative in critical terms is an easy route, there is also a sense in which *S-CAPE*'s vision 'to see victims of human trafficking free and safe from exploitation, healed, and restored, empowered with life skills, and restored to a normal and sustainable life' is informed by a different understanding of redemption (n.p.). One that is concerned with the 'transformation of the structures of reality away from their systemic distortion' (Schussler Fiorenza 1994:292) is an understanding of redemption that is empowering and that entails a positive sense of freedom that highlights solidarity with G/god and fellow human beings (p. 293).

Moreover, because 'a range of practical skills are taught to empower survivors to live full and independent lives after they leave the safe house', there is an assumption that the notion of restoration aimed for here is not one of simple reinsertion into previously existing structures (Hope for Women 2017: n.p.). Instead, it is arguable that the restoration at stake is one where the women feel empowered to be in control of their own lives. Such an understanding of redemption and restoration is akin to some early Catholic missionaries' approach to mission work in Africa. Specifically, as Pawlikova-Vilhanova (2007) notes:

'[T]ransforming Africa by the Africans', was the formula advocated by Cardinal Lavignerie in his instructions to the White Fathers. 'The missionaries must therefore be mainly initiators, but the lasting work must be accomplished by the Africans themselves, once they have become Christians and apostles. And it must be clearly noted here that we say: become Christians and not become French or Europeans.' Missionaries were therefore asked to adapt themselves to the Africans, to strip themselves, as much as possible, of the cultural elements peculiar to them, of their language in the first place. (p. 254)

That is, redemption and restoration here are reworked to take seriously the dangers of cultural imperialism by interpreting it in particular terms that speak to the women's experiences. In this sense, although the organisations work within a clearly identified moral paradigm of Christian redemption and restoration, these concepts are engaged with or explicated as a 'praxis of what is historically concrete' (Schussler Fiorenza 1994:296). Redemption and restoration are not simply abstract concepts that concern only theological exegesis, but actually have implications for how the visions and missions of the various organisations are actualised or realised in practice.

Conclusion

By way of concluding, one could argue that as communities of production, interpretation and practice, *Embrace Dignity*, *Hope for Women*, *Red Light*, *S-CAPE* and *STOP* are involved in a process of delicate balancing. On the one hand is the push of the universalist discourse of anti-slavery/trafficking with its paternalism, and on the other hand is the praxis of responding to a particular context of South Africa with the Christian message of salvation, redemption and transformation. As such, it is true that from a certain perspective the overtly Christian religious language of these organisations possibly delimits their capacity to have a stronger and broader social impact focused specifically on anti-slavery/trafficking. That is, the limitations of a Christian-centred notion of doing anti-slavery/trafficking work are very obvious when read through the lens of suspicion.³ However, one can also ask whether it's possible to see beyond this limitation in pursuit of a more inclusive project of addressing the very real problem of modern-day slavery/trafficking that sees even in these Christian-centred and paternalistic organisations a process that, whilst limited in its imaginative capacity, has the potential to shift perspective and elicit some hope for change.

It should be reiterated that one of the major contributions arising from the foregoing analysis is the specifically contextualised elucidation of the concept of 'the ambivalence of religion', where Christianity in particular has been shown to be both a source of change and proscriptive limitation in responding to questions of modern-day slavery and trafficking. On the one hand, Christian discourse provides a language that gives voice to the praxis of challenging the restrictions of modern-day slavery/trafficking by instilling norms of self-transformation. On the other hand, the very same Christian discourse on redemption and restoration abrogates self-transformation by reading such transformation as possible only through specifically Christian salvation narratives. Interestingly, the purchase of this restoration discourse finds resonance in the broader South African public sphere where indigenous and multiple-oriented perspectives of being religious are already generally subsumed under a Christian narrative, despite constitutional claims of diversity otherwise.

3. For an interesting perspective on the negative role of religions in trafficking see Heil 2017.

In its analysis of such ambiguity, then, the article has teased out ways in which the Christian religious discourse of modern-day anti-trafficking/slavery organisations offers a language that also tries to move beyond paternalism by emphasising self-restoration. That is, these organisations seem to be of two minds in their capacities to think the self in avowedly political terms of agentic self-determination by locating restoration 'elsewhere' and continuing in the problematic discourses of paternalism. However, their ambivalence raises an interesting question regarding how to deal with such organisations in productive ways that balance their humanitarian work with the politics of self-representation within the paternalistic anti-slavery/trafficking discourse.

In the final analysis, the general trend observable in the research results so far subtends the view that Christianity, as a heterogeneous tradition, addresses the relationship between anti-slavery/trafficking and religions in an ambiguous way. Therefore, rather than simply assuming that all Christian discourses of anti-slavery/trafficking pander to the dominant narrative of paternalism within the discourse of modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking, scholars should also look at the narratives proffered by religious organisations as ambiguous. Further research to this end that specifically draws on ethnographic accounts would be useful. For now, it suffices to conclude, on the basis of the analysis proffered, that the problematic and fruitful use of Christian discourses of anti-slavery/trafficking in South Africa highlights the ways in which some religious organisations use specifically religious configurations of redemption and restoration to challenge modern-day anti-slavery/trafficking.

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