



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

A MATTER OF FAITH?

Combating human trafficking in Thailand & Cambodia

Andreas Henriksson

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal UB.A.2010 – Lindelhallen 1, Universitetsbiblioteket, fredagen den 3 maj, kl. 13:15.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Seniorforskare Marie Juul Petersen, The Danish Institute for Human Rights, Köpenhamn, Danmark.

Organization

Umeå University
Department of Political Science

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

12 April 2024

Author

Andreas Henriksson

Title

A matter of faith? Combatting human trafficking in Thailand & Cambodia

Abstract

Human trafficking is estimated to affect about 49 million people worldwide. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are extensively involved in efforts to counter this global problem, alongside governments, intergovernmental organizations, and various types of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, not enough attention has been directed to understanding the antitrafficking responses of FBOs. Do their activities differ from secular antitrafficking actors, why so, and how are these activities received? This thesis aims to understand and explain the role and impact of faith in antitrafficking, as one sub-field of development cooperation, through a case study of the antitrafficking efforts of three Christian FBOs in Thailand and Cambodia. Thailand and Cambodia are two countries where human trafficking is prevalent, and where there is a significant concentration of NGOs and FBOs operating against human trafficking. Studying these contexts may therefore generate insights that have wider relevance beyond the region, and beyond the field of antitrafficking specifically. The study builds on individual as well as group interviews with staff of the FBOs, observations of the activities of the FBOs, as well as document reviews. The empirical material also includes interviews with representatives of secular antitrafficking NGOs, government officials, and recipients or community members in the areas where the FBOs implement their work. The thesis draws on a multidimensional theoretical framework that allows the analysis to capture the specific characteristics of FBO antitrafficking practices, how ideas and social relations shape their work, and how their antitrafficking work is received, perceived and negotiated when implemented in practice. This analytical approach generates a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of FBOs as antitrafficking and development actors.

The findings reveal that faith-based antitrafficking practice is distinguished by its emphasis on the post-trauma phases of antitrafficking work, through interventions focusing on e.g. trauma healing, or vocational training. The religious worldview of the FBOs shapes their practices and leads to a focus on individual (spiritual and moral) transformation. The three FBOs can therefore be viewed as engaging in therapeutic modes of governance, emphasizing individual responsibility and immaterial wellbeing. FBOs are also distinguished by their specific funding patterns. Instead of mainstream development donors, FBOs are primarily funded by faith-based donor networks consisting to a significant degree of faith-based donors such as churches, individual donors, and other FBOs. While secular norms incentivize the FBOs to de-emphasize their faith identity in interactions with secular partners and donors, their faith-based donor relationships enable them to use religion as a motivator for change in communities and for individual spiritual and moral transformation. Moreover, religious difference does not present a significant obstacle when the FBOs implement their work in primarily Buddhist recipient communities. In contrast, the results indicate that religion can be a resource, rather than a problem, in establishing co-ownership with local actors in the antitrafficking work of the FBOs. However, in interactions with secular antitrafficking actors, finding common ground is more challenging: the religious–secular divide seems wider than the Christian-Buddhist divide. The thesis shows that faith matters for design, implementation, and the reception of antitrafficking programs. However, the impact of religious faith is contextual, and therefore depends on the interaction with cultural norms and values, as well as material conditions.

Keywords

Human trafficking, antitrafficking, faith-based organizations, religion in development, faith infusion, secularism, therapeutic governance, holistic development, co-ownership, Cambodia, Thailand

Language

English

ISBN

print: 978-91-8070-332-1
PDF: 978-91-8070-333-8

ISSN

0349-0831

Number of pages

144 + 4 papers