Faith Based Organizations: Types and Typologies. A Scoping Review (2010-2021)

Sarah Maes[a]; M. Schrooten[b], P. Raeymaeckers[c], B. Broeckaert[d]

SARAH MAES is a joint Ph.D. student at the department of social sciences at the University of Antwerp and the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of KU Leuven. She is affiliated with the Center for Research on Environmental and Social Change (CRESC, University of Antwerp) and the Research Unit of Theological and Comparative Ethics (KU Leuven). Her main topics of interest are social work research, religious organizations, informal social work practices, solidarity work. sarah.maes@uantwerpen.be, +32479467613.

MIEKE SCHROOTEN (Ph.D.) is professor of social work at the University of Antwerp and Odisee University of Applied Sciences (Brussels). She is affiliated with the Center for Research on Environmental and Social Change (CRESC, University of Antwerp) and the Research Centre Social Work (Odisee University of Applied Sciences). Her main topics of interest are mobility, transnational social work and informal social work practices. mieke.schrooten@uantwerpen.be.

PETER RAEYMAECKERS (Ph.D.) is professor at the master of social work at the University of Antwerp and affiliated with the Center for Research on Environmental and Social Change (CRESC). His main topics of interest are social work research, evaluation of social work practice, advocacy, governance and inter-organizational networks. peter.raeymaeckers@uantwerpen.be.

BERT BROECKAERT (Ph.D.) is full professor of comparative and medical ethics at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (KU Leuven) where he is a member of the Research Unit of Theological and Comparative Ethics. His main topics of interest are religious diversity in contemporary Belgium and Europe, palliative care and end of life ethics. bert.broeckaert@kuleuven.be.

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Abstract

In this paper, we present the results of our scoping review on the literature (2010-2021) on faith-based organizations (FBOs) active in the field of poverty alleviation. We focus on the different typologies that are used to study FBOs. Because not all articles use an existing typology or develop a new one, we also collected and studied the variables that are used in the articles to distinguish different types of FBOs.

Our research shows that the field of faith-based organizations is simply to complex and diverse to allow the construction of an overarching typology. Therefore, we present a new way to study this type of social work actors by proposing a set of four categories (Religion, Solidarity, Organization and Location) and nineteen variables to use as a heuristic tool in future research.

Keywords

Faith-based organizations, typology, poverty, religion

Word count: 9699

Introduction

Churches and congregations have always been involved in caring for people in poverty and need (Claessens, 2017; Plionis, 1991; Praglin, 2004). Even now, despite the secularization of many contemporary Western societies, numerous initiatives with a religious inspiration make a contribution to welfare and wellbeing that cannot be underestimated (Beaumont & Cloke, 2012; van den Toorn et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, in the last few decades, in the context of solidarity and poverty reduction, social scientists have increasingly focused on the role and impact of organizations that are in one way or another linked to religions and/or religious congregations – the so-called *faith-based organizations* (FBOs) (Cnaan & Newman, 2010; Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013a; Lusk & Corbett; 2021). Social work and religion have a long-standing but complex and constantly evolving relationship (Crisp, 2014). Social workers are sometimes employed as frontline workers in FBOs, and more importantly, the daily practices of secular (welfare state) organizations and FBOs are not disconnected; in reality they are sometimes intertwined (Snyder, 2015; Crisp, 2014 & 2017). At the same time, there is still a lot of mutual prejudice and distrust (Moris & Maes, 2021; van Dam et al, 2022).

Today, especially in the often very secularized European context, where religion now has a much less central role in both society and the individual lives of many inhabitants, it is still necessary for social workers to be familiar with religious beliefs and practices (Gibson et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2014; Crisp, 2017). One important reason for this is that social workers will often interact with migrants for whom religion often is very important and a crucial connection point in the 'new' country (Crisp, 2017). For this target group religiously inspired solidarity initiatives such as FBOs have two main advantages over secular organizations: first, they are translocal in orientation. FBOs can transcend the local and national context more easily than secular welfare state organizations - which are usually funded by the state - and work beyond the national level to network and connect with others. Religion is indeed a global phenomenon and not bound to a certain place. Second, the social and cultural role of

FBOs is much larger and broader than that of secular organizations (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019), going beyond the provision of specific services but caring for the person as a whole while also taking into account his/her spiritual needs (Crisp, 2014). In this way FBOs are often very important in the lives of people with a migration background and thus deserve the attention of social workers. Social workers should try to understand how beliefs and/or practices manifest themselves in the life of particular individuals (Clark, 2006) and develop an empathic understanding of the client's spiritual worldview, enabling them to take into account the way possible interventions resonate with this worldview (Hodge, 2017). However, social workers are often confronted with the large diversity of FBOs and lack insights on how FBOs are structured and what types of services and support these actors provide.

Over the years there have been many attempts to categorize or typologize FBOs involved in caring for people in poverty and need (Clarke & Ware, 2015; Purser, 2017; Mitchel, 2016; Kirmani, 2012, Hancox, 2019). Given the diversity within the field of FBOs, in this article we chose to look in detail at which typologies are used in the academic literature and how in these studies FBOs are compared to each other. Within their earlier literature reviews on FBOs and poverty alleviation, Bielefeld & Cleveland (2013a; 2013b), Clarke & Ware (2015) and Offut et al. (2016) have attempted to bring the existing typologies together and provide a comprehensive overview. However, these reviews are now more than a decade old. Moreover, both these earlier studies and earlier reviews mainly focus on the US context.

With this new scoping review of the literature on FBOs and poverty alleviation (2010-2021), we sought to determine what categories and typologies are being put forward within academic research on these so-called FBOs, focusing on the ways in which FBOs are compared to one another rather than to their secular counterparts (such as NGOs). In doing so we want to be as inclusive as possible by not imposing any geographic restrictions. The

broader aim of this scoping review is to help future research by offering a tool to understand and make sense of the wide variety of FBOs in different national or international contexts (including the Belgian context we are exploring in our ongoing research). By providing a new and more open framework, this research aims to do justice to the rich diversity of religion-based solidarity initiatives, thereby improving mutual understanding and promoting better collaboration with secular and public service organisations.

Methodology

We used a five-stage approach (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) as the methodological basis for this scoping review. First, we determined the initial research questions, next we identified the relevant studies, made our study selection, charted and collated the data and finally we summarized and reported our findings in this article (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Daudt et al., 2013; Levac et al., 2010; O'Flaherty & Philips, 2015; Pham et al., 2014).

Research questions

In this article, we focus on how the available empirical studies (2010-2021) use the concept of "faith-based organizations" in the field of poverty alleviation. In a second article we wrote based on this scoping review (Maes et al., forthcoming), we discuss the different meanings given to the concept of FBO in the available empirical studies (2010-2021). Here we want to focus on how these studies classify FBOs into different categories and typologies. This brings us to the following two research questions. (1) What, if any, are the specific typologies of FBOs these studies use or introduce? (2) What, if any, are the specific variables these studies use do distinguish different types of FBOs?

Identifying relevant studies

We searched several databases to find relevant studies: Atla RDB, Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), Scopus and Web of Science to fully capture the intersections of the various scientific disciplines: the Atla Religion Database for theology and religious studies, ProQuest and Scopus for social sciences and Web of Science, which covers all scientific disciplines. Google Scholar was used to search for grey literature.

To ensure a broad coverage of the available literature, we opted for a general search query"(faith-based) or ("faith based") AND organi*ations" combined with terms related to poverty (poor, poverty, deprivation, destitution, "low income", underprivileged, deprived) to identify the studies related to the field of poverty aid. We used two searches in Google Scholar: "faith*based organizations" AND poverty and "faith*based organisations" AND poverty.

Our inclusion criteria were articles: (1) published from 2010 onwards; (2) written in English; (3) peer-reviewed; (4) that study FBOs in the present. Grounds for exclusion were articles: (1) that only mention FBOs but do not elaborate on them further in the article; (2) that do not mention FBOs or any significant derivative; (3) in which there is no clear focus on poverty; (4) that focus solely and exclusively - without linking it to poverty - on 'technical' health care issues.

Study selection

The database search was implemented on March 16, 2021. The outcome of this search was a total of 11 results in Atla, 250 results in Sociological abstracts, 74 results in Scopus and 272 results in Web of Science. The Google Scholar search was on July 5, 2021. As suggested by Pham et al. (2014: 373) the a priori decision was made to screen only the first 100 hits sorted by relevance.

This database search yielded 707 records that we first examined for possible duplication (165); the 542 remaining records were screened against our inclusion and exclusion criteria (language, type of item). After this screening, 369 articles remained, which we screened for use of the term FBO (present or not) and focus on poverty. Articles that dealt exclusively with (aspects of) health care were excluded. For this screening, all abstracts of the articles were read and if they did not provide enough information, the full article was screened. In the end, 52 articles were selected for analysis in the scoping review.
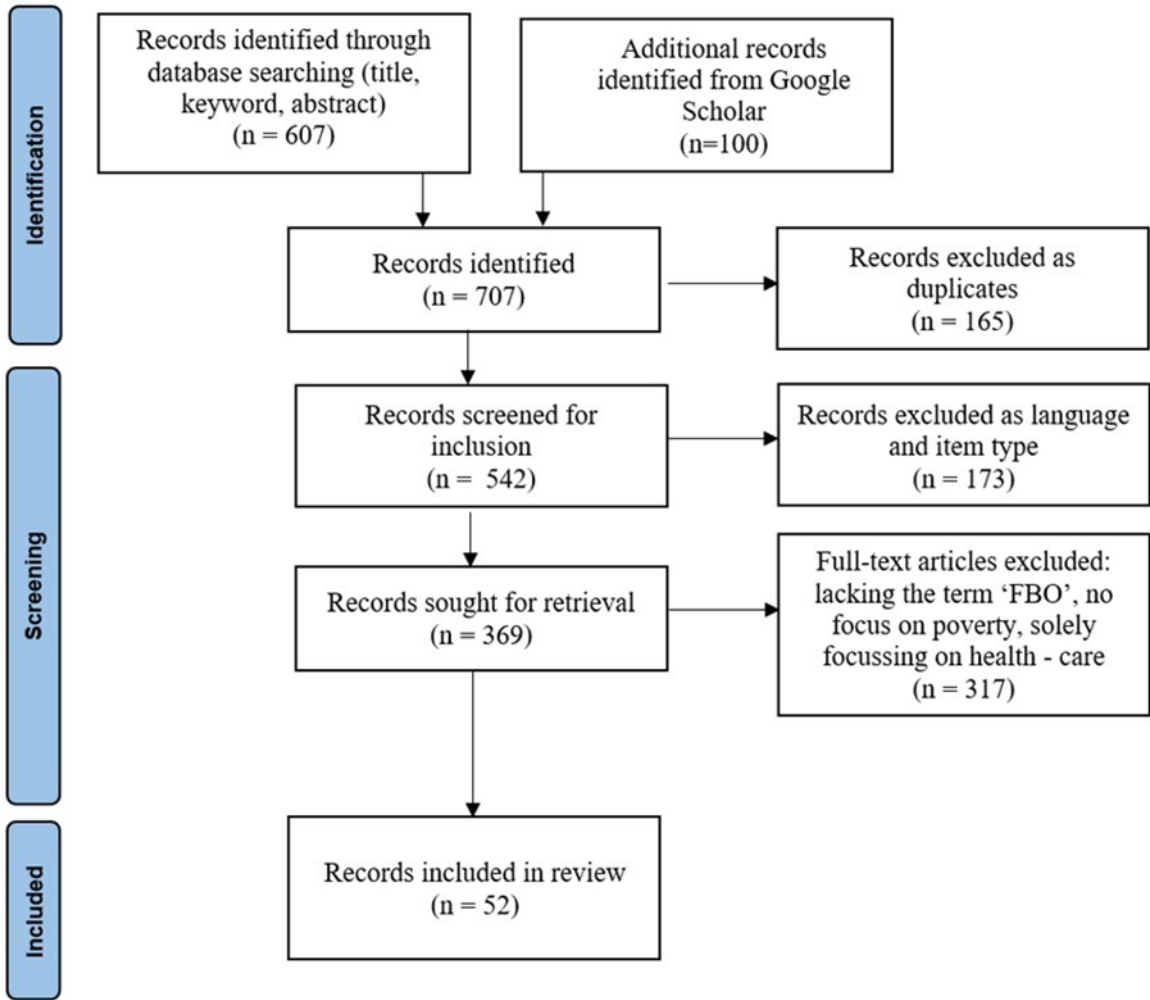

Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart of study selection process. Page et al. (2021)

Findings

Table 1 below lists the 47[1] articles selected for full text analysis. Thirty-nine of these articles involve specific case studies, 14 single case and 25 multiple case studies. The remaining articles study in a more general way the situation or the work of FBOs in a specific geographical context or compare, in a more general way, FBOs in two contexts. Most authors are affiliated with US (29%) or European (32%) institutions. Seven authors are affiliated to African; three to Asian and three to Australian institutions. Looking at the geographical context of the studies (column 6), we find that 8 articles focus on the European context, 13 on the African, 8 on the Asian, 2 on the South American and 12 on the North American. In column 5, we check whether the studies also include informal organizations or initiatives. Thirteen authors include informal initiatives or organizations as FBOs in their research; one author (Du Toit, 2019) explicitly states that he *does not*. The remaining articles only look at formal FBOs that have a clear organizational structure and de facto exclude informal initiatives or organizations.

Given our research questions, the two most important columns in table 1 are the second and the third. In the second column, we investigated whether the author(s) use(s) an existing

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[1] The five articles that are literature reviews, based on articles from an earlier period (1997-2014), were left out from this table. Bielefeld & Cleveland (2013a) examine the term FBO in the period 2001-2011 and the definitions and typologies within the American context in that period. In a second article Bielefeld & Cleveland (2013b) explore the relationship between the welfare state and how it ignores the role of FBOs. The other authors (Hancox, 2019; Clarke & Ware, 2015;Offut et al., 2016) examine the role of FBOs in development aid. Hancox (2019) focuses on Christian organisations and how to define them by examining articles between 1997 and 2014. Offut et al. (2016) take a broader look at how religious motivation of people and organizations leads to the improvement of poverty worldwide scanning articles before 2015. Clarke & Ware (2015) use articles published in the period 2000-2013 and examine how FBOs differ from NGOs within the domain of development aid and poverty reduction.

formal typology and/or create(s) their own formal typology to compare or distinguish FBOs. We found only ten articles using an existing typology; the typologies of three authors are the most common, although each is only used in a small minority of the articles reviewed here. Monsma's 1996 typology or his slightly modified 2003 version was used eight times (Monsma, 1996 & 2003); Clarke's five-fold typology based on function and/or objectives of FBOs was used three times (Clarke, 2006). Clarke's later typology is based on the four main ways in which FBOs deploy faith through social or political engagement or link faith to development or humanitarian objectives and was used five times (Clarke, 2008); and finally, the six-fold typology of Sider & Unruh (2004) in which the authors examine the position of faith within an organization, was used four times in the articles in our scoping review.

Though we found that only a minority of the articles used a formal typology to categorize FBOs and Olarinmoye (2012) was the only author who constructed an original typology (focusing on the Nigerian context), one cannot conclude from this that most of the articles we reviewed are treating FBOs as an undifferentiated, homogeneous phenomenon, as all articles reviewed identify and use one or more variables to distinguish different kinds of FBOs (column 3).

Table 1 – overview of the articles

Authors	Typology	Variables	Religions involved	Informal initiatives included?	Geographical context
Ali & Hatta, 2014	None	- Organization (Funding): "Zakat in poverty reduction programs" - Religion (Context): "Muslim countries" - Religion (People): "Muslim social workers, volunteers of the organizations"	Muslim	Yes	Bangladesh, Malaysia & Indonesia
Beukes, 2019	None	- Organization (Type): "Form of Church: 1. the church as ecumenical church (whether global, national, regional or local); 2. the church as denomination(s); 3. the church as (mostly local) congregations; 4. the church as worshipping communities; 5. the church as individual believers (in the fullness of their personal, private and public lives); 6. the church as believers (individuals or groups) participating in initiatives and actions, together with others." - Religion (Congregation) - Religion (Link to congregation): "How is the church involved in the society of public life?" - Location (Specific Location)	Christian	Yes	South Africa
Bolger, 2020	None	- Religion (Congregation): - Religion (Link to Congregation): "Partnership with local congregations" - Location (Specific location) - Location (Type of location) - Solidarity (Clients): "How is deservingness of the clients determined within the organization?"	Christian	Yes	USA
Carino, 2016	None	- Religion (People): "moral transformation or Christian stewardship" - Location (Specific location)	Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Protestant, Muslim	No	China

Cascale, Nixon, Flicker, Rubincam, & Jenney, 2010	Typology of Liebowitz (2002)	- Organization (Funding): "public or private" - Religion (Link to congregation) - Location (Type of location)	Christian	No	South Africa
Cnaan & Newman, 2010	None	- Organization (Size and scope) - Location (Type of location)	Various	No	USA
Dahan, 2019	None	- Solidarity (Clients) - Organization (Relation): "How political culture affects the mode of urban governance along the Israeli government - NARMIF axis" - Location (Specific location) - Religion (Congregation): "Nationalist-Religious Mission Force (Hebrew, garinim toraniyim, henceforth, NARMIF)"	Christian	Yes	Israel
Day, 2013	None	- Organization (Size and scope) - Location (Type of location) - Religion (Congregation)	Christian	No	USA
Deacon, 2012	None	- Organization (Type): "Religious institute or local congregation or informal organizations" - Religion (Link to congregation): "Pentecostalism" - Location (Specific location)- Religion (Objectives): "contemporary urban challenges. . . [giving] meaning to human life, while simultaneously equipping . . . adherents to be resourceful in meeting diverse challenges"	Christian	Yes	Kenya
Denning, 2019	None	- Religion (Context): "Influence of the faith network" - Solidarity (Clients): "People with holiday hunger" - Solidarity (Type): "Respond to holiday hunger"	Christian	No	UK
Du Toit, 2019	- Sider & Unruh (2004) - Hefferan et al. (2009) - Clarke (2008)	- Religion (Congregation) "Type of belief system - Religion (Link to congregation): "Christian theology" - Religion (Objectives): "the value ascribed to Christian theology, ethics and beliefs in shaping FBO practice" - Location (Specific location) - Location (Type of location): "In which areas of the cape metropole does your organization work"	Christian	Explicit excludes	South Africa

Fridolfsson & Elander, 2012	None	- Religion (People) "strong or weak influence on the members" - Organization (Context): "Interaction with secularism and post secularism and multi-level governance" - Location (Specific)	Christian	Yes	Sweden
Grieve & Olivier, 2018	None	- Organization (Context) "Impact of socio-political context and global forces" - Solidarity (type): "basic needs and health care" - Solidarity (sector): "Health care" -Religion (Congregation) - Religion (Link to congregation)	Christian	Yes	Ghana
Hackworth, 2010	- Monsma (1996 & 2003) - Sider & Unruh (2004)	- Organization (Type) "religious institute or local congregation or informal organizations" - Solidarity (Sector): "Poverty aid: urban homeless" - Religion (Congregation) - Religion (Importance of religion) - Organization (Funding): "Historically they refused government funding, nowadays some of them apply for at least a part of the government funding" - Organization (Staff) & (Size & Scope): "Rescue Missions are highly varied in terms of size, scope, funding arrangements, and clientele served" - Organization (Relations)	Christian	No	USA
Hankins & Walter, 2012	None	- Organization (Relations) "influence of the faith network" - Organization (Embedding): "Place making in specific neighborhoods" - Religion (Objectives): "faith-based community development" - Religion (Congregation) - Religion (Link to congregation): "Christian Community Development Organization" - Solidarity (Sector): "Poor neighborhoods" - Solidarity (Clients): Specific communities - Location - Location (Type of location): "City – specific communities"	Christian	No	USA
Hiilamo, 2012	None	- Organization (Size and scope): "money or services" - Religion (Link to congregation)	Protestant	No	Finland

		- Religion (Congregation): "Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church" - Religion (Context): "The context of Protestantism in Finland" - Organization (Context): "The Church – state relationship and the Finnish welfare state context" - Location (Specific Location) - Solidarity (Sector): "Specific poor relief"			
Hughes, 2019	None	- Location (Type of location) "location: close or far" - Location (Specific Location) - Solidarity (Clients): "Poor African American women" - Solidarity (Type): "Poverty alleviation: food, basic needs, housing, children." - Religion (Link to Congregation) - Religion (People): "some churches only offer assistance to members of that particular church, and others require that the members tithe regularly in order to be eligible for assistance" -Organization (Type) - Religion (Context)	Christian	Yes	USA
Jones, 2013	None	- Location (Specific Location) - Religion (Congregation) - Solidarity (Type): "Rapprochement of Somali woman refugees" - Solidarity (Clients): "Somali refugees (specific women)" Organization (Context): How does this organization operate in a post-secular context?	Christian, Muslim	No	UK
Kirmani, 2012	Clarke (2006)	- Organization (Context): "Impact of the socio-political context" - Location (Specific location) - Location (Type) - Organization (Context): "Religion and the forming of the social political landscape" - Solidarity (Type): "Development related activities" - Solidarity (Sector): "Development" -Organization (Size and Scope) - Religion (Objectives)	Christian, Hindu, Muslim	No	Pakistan

		- Organization (Staff) - Religion (Congregation) - Location (Type of location) - Religion (Activities) - Religion (Objectives)			
Kose, 2019	- Sider & Unruh (2004) - Clarke (2008) - Swart et al. (2010)	- Religion (Congregation) - Organization (Type): "Institutionalized (old) versus non-institutionalized (young)" - Organization (Relations): "FBO-state relation"	Muslim	Yes	Turkey
Kvasny & Lee, 2011	None	- View on FBOs by a womanist perspective - Location (specific location): "Communities" - Organization (Context): "Influence of state decisions on Black Churches, such as the faith-based initiatives act" - Organization (Staff) - Organization (Type): "Churches and grassroot organizations"	Christian	No	USA
Lancione, 2014	None	- Religion (Congregation) - Location (Specific Location) - Solidarity (Sector):" Homeless people" - Religion (Objectives): "Caritas & Agape (Love)" - Location (Type of location): "Spaces of care in the city" - Religion (Link to congregation)	Christian	No	Italy, Turin
Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015	Secular-Religious Identity Spectrum (SRIS)	- Religion (People) "influence of faith on the volunteers" -Organization (Relation) - Religion (Link to congregation) - Solidarity (Sector): "Poverty relief" - Solidarity (Clients): "People with chronic underemployment and others living under the poverty level" - Solidarity (Type): "Basic needs, work, housing" -Organization (Funding): "State funding" -Location (Specific location) - Location (Type of location) - Organization (Embedding)	Christian	No	USA
Littlefield, 2010	None	- Location (Specific location) - Organization (Staff): "Educational level; Race"	Christian	No	USA

		- Organization (Size & Scope) - Organization (Type) - Religion (Congregation) - Religion (Link to congregation) - Religion (People) - Organization (Funding): "Funding by congregations, by type of organization" - Solidarity (Type) - Solidarity (Sector)			
Lusk & Corbett, 2021	None	- Religion (Objectives): "Liberation theory and praxis" - Organization (Context) - Location (Specific location) - Location (Type of location): "Base communities" - Solidarity (Type) - Organization (Type): "Small grassroot organizations"		No	Latin America
Malcom, 2012	None	- Organization (Size and scope) "Membership size" - Location (Specific location) - Religion (Congregation): "Christian" - Religion (People) - Organization (Embedding): "In the area of the city" - Solidarity (Sector): "Education" - Solidarity (Clients): "Young people, youth"		No	UK
Mashau, 2012	None	- Organization (Funding) - Location (Specific location) - Religion (Congregation): "Christian" - Religion (People) - Solidarity (Sector): "Poverty alleviation" - Solidarity (Clients): "Homeless and poor people" - Solidarity (Type): "Basic needs and housing" - Religion (Activities)	Christian	No	South – Africa
Matous, Wang, & Lau, 2021	None	- Solidarity (Type) "Educational activities, health activities, building stronger networks" - Solidarity (Clients): "People in poverty" - Religion (Congregation): "Christian" - Location (Type of location)	Christian	No	Philippines

		- Organization (Embedding)			
Mitchell, 2016	- Monsma (1996) - Jeavons (1998) - Clarke (2006) - Sider & Unruh (2004)	- Solidarity (Type) "Services identified by congregations as a priory with additional resources" - Religion (Congregation): "Christian" - Religion (Link to Congregation) - Solidarity (Sector): "Development" - Location (Type of location)	Christian	No	Central Europe & Central Africa
Morvaridi, 2013	Clarke (2008)	- Religion (People): "influence of faith on the volunteers and staff" - Organization (Funding): "Incomes by alms" - Religion (Congregation): - Religion (Objectives): "Zakat, and other forms of alms giving for the poor"	Muslim	Yes	Turkey
Moyer, 2015	None	- Organization (Context) "Relation with the national context and the welfare state" - Organization (Type)	Christian	No	Kenia
Ntakirutimana, 2018	None	- Organization (Size and scope) "service delivery or capacity building or political activism" - Organization (Context) - Organization (Embedding) - Organization (Staff)	Christian	No	South Africa
Occhipinti, 2013	None	- Location (Type of location) "location: rural or city" - Solidarity (Sector): Development	Christian	No	Argentina
Olarinmoye, 2012	- Clarke (2008) - Jeavons (1998) - Mccarthy & Castelli (1999) - Cnaan (1999) - Proper typology	- Solidarity (Clients) - Solidarity (Sector): Development - Location (Specific location) - Organization (Funding): "Different donors and the Nigerian state" - Solidarity (Type): Various types of services	Christian, Islam and traditional religions	Yes	Nigeria
Philips, 2010	None	- Organization (Funding)	Christian	No	USA

Purser & Henningan, 2017	- Monsma (2003) - Hackworth (2012) - Gowan & Atmore (2012)	- Religion (People): "Connection to the organization" - Solidarity (Clients): "Urban poor and unemployed" - Solidarity (Sector): "Job readiness program" - Religion (Activities): "Biblically based job training"	Christian	No	USA
Sakai, 2012	None	- Solidarity (Clients) - Solidarity (Type): "Free health services, food pantries, help for victims of disasters" - Religion (Congregation)	Muslim, Christian, Buddhist	No	Indonesia
Skjortnes, 2014	None	- Location (Type of location) "location: city, rural, neighborhood, community" - Organization (Funding) - Organization (Type)	Lutheran and Christian	No	Madagascar
Snyder, Bell & Busch-Armendariz, 2015	- Adkins et al. (2010) - Crisp (2014)	-Organization (Embedding) "relation with the neighborhoods" - Organization (Context) - Organization (Staff)	Not specified	Yes	USA
Sookrajh & Chetty, 2012	None	- Organization (Context): socio-political context - Solidarity (Type): Community development - Solidarity (Clients): Poor people - Location (Type): Communities	Hinduism	No	South Africa
Strothmann, 2012	None	- Organization (Funding) - Solidarity (Clients): "Beggars, drug addicts and homeless people" - Solidarity (Type): Basic needs, educational and medical	Muslim	No	Pakistan
Taylor, 2012	None	- Organization (Staff, Size): "number of employees" - Religion (Activities): "Poverty relief support" - Location (Specific location)	Christian, Muslim	No	Nigeria & Tanzania
Thornton, Sakai & Hassall, 2012	None	- Organization (Size and scope)): "number of clients" - Solidarity (Sector): Development - Religion (Congregation): Christian	Christian	No	Asia
van Zeeland, 2016	None	Organization (Relations): "relation with the welfare state" Solidarity (Sector): "Development, inequality matters" Solidarity (Type): "Alleviating different conditions of quality of life, education, health and longevity"	Christian	No	South Africa and Latin America

Wier, 2014	None	- Organization (Funding): "impact of state funding" - Solidarity (Type): Basic needs - Religion (Activities): "Making a stranger feeling welcome"	Christian	Yes	UK
Yang, 2014	None	- Solidarity (Clients): Refugees - Location (Specific location): - Organization (Context): "Relation with the government" - Religion (Context): Specific religious context and conflicts	Christian	No	India
Zavos, 2019	None	- Organization (Size and scope) - Solidarity (Clients): "Poor immigrants and people suffering from food poverty" - Solidarity (Type): "Soup and street kitchens" - Religion (Congregation) - Location (Specific location) - Location (Type of location) - Religion (Context)	Sikh, Islam and Hindu	No	UK

Discussion

Typologies and their drawbacks

As already mentioned in the results above, there are three authors (Clarke, Monsma, and Sider & Unruh) whose typology appears more frequently - but still only in a small minority of the articles - in our scoping review. However, from the outset there have also been serious criticisms of these typologies (e.g., in the same journal issue in which Sider & Unruh's typology (2004) was published). Therefore, after a brief presentation of the different typologies, in this first part of our discussion we offer a comprehensive critique of the typological efforts so far.

Clarke developed two typologies, the first focusing on the functions and objectives of FBOs - on 'what they do' (Clarke, 2006). In this five-fold typology he distinguishes the following categories: (1) faith-based representative organizations, (2) faith-based charitable or development organizations, (3) faith-based socio-political organizations, (4) faith-based missionary organizations, (5) faith-based radical, illegal or terrorist organizations (Clarke, 2006; Olarinmoye, 2012). In a second typology Clarke distinguishes FBOs by focusing on the four main ways in which they can deploy faith through social and political engagement or link faith to developmental or humanitarian objectives (Clarke, 2008; Du Toit, 2019). The four ways are: (1) passive, (2) active, (3) persuasive, and (4) exclusive (Clarke, 2008). Both typologies are mainly applied within articles focusing on development aid; it is also from this context that both typologies were developed by the author. Nevertheless, the categories can also be used in a non-development context.

Monsma (1996) developed the religious practice scale (RPS), in which he measures religiosity among FBOs involved in aid and poverty relief in the global South.

One of the main criticisms of this scale was that it only takes into account overt religiosity whereas some organizations do have certain religious values and norms or are linked to certain religions without showing this openly (Mitchell, 2016). Therefore, in his later scale and typology Monsma (2003) did look at more hidden aspects of religiosity too. This resulted in a scale for faith-based programs that ranged from "nominally religious" to programs that are "deeply and pervasively religious". Monsma (2003) further divided faith-based practices into faith-based/segmented (keeping religious practices rather separate from welfare services) and faith-based/integrated (integrating religious elements into their welfare services) programs (Hackworth, 2010).

The last commonly used typology is the six-fold typology of Sider & Unruh (2004). The starting point of this typology is the assumption that the position of religion within an organization is dynamic. Sider & Unruh (2004) state that we can look at a degree of 'religious integration' through the presence of religion at different levels and domains of the organization. To study this, the authors distinguish eight organizational elements that can be tested against the presence or absence of religion. In this way, they developed a six-fold typology: five types of religious organizations and secular organizations as a sixth type. The five types of religious organizations are: faith-permeated, faith-centered, faith-affiliated, faith background, and faith-secular partnership.

The first criticism we want to formulate regarding these typologies is that all of them are immediately *narrowing down* the field of FBOs by assuming and thus demanding a *formal* organizational structure. On the one hand, because they treat them as a specific type of NGO (Sider & Unruh, 2004; Clarke, 2005) – and NGOs are of course formal organizations. On the other hand, because they use several organizational criteria referring to board of directors, management, staff, mission statement etc. that

take the structure and characteristics of a formal organization for granted (Sider & Unruh, 2004). We formulate a similar critique in our forthcoming study on the definition of FBOs (Maes et al., forthcoming). Religiously inspired initiatives, however, often originate from the bottom up, are often limited to a certain area or specific target group and/or deliberately remain small-scale (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019; Maes et al., forthcoming; van Dam et al., 2022). As a result of all this they only rarely have an elaborate, formal organizational structure – certainly in their early years. Therefore, the above typologies are narrowing down the group of FBOs to an artificially constructed subgroup as they are excluding important informal, small-scale initiatives and organizations. Precisely these types of FBOs are important to study because they often work in the margins of society for the very people who find it difficult to get or ask for help in any other way (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019; Moris & Maes, 2021; van den Toorn et al., 2020). For these reasons we find it very problematic to use any typology that excludes and thus obscures these small-scale, informal initiatives simply as a result of an unwarranted 'organizational' bias. Moreover, given the organizational bias in the term faith-based *organization* itself, we prefer to move away from this term and introduce the term RSI (religion-based solidarity initiatives), defined as 'Social actions and (in)formal initiatives that, from a religious inspiration, aim to aid people in need of support' instead (Maes et al., forthcoming). This new term and definition do not take a formal organizational structure for granted and allow us to also include in research (as was done in 13 of the 47 articles included in the review) informal initiatives that constitute an important way in which religious solidarity is played out in society.

A second criticism that we strongly agree with, already formulated by Bielefeld & Cleveland (2013a), is that not only the term FBO itself, but also the way its characteristics are compared in the typologies discussed here, start from a *protestant-*

christian view on religion. The word 'faith', as used in the term FBO, is not a neutral, universal category, but a concept that plays a central role especially in Christianity and especially in Protestantism (think of Luther's *sola fide*). However, this inner, personal experience of the individual member of a religious community is not necessarily the core of religion or of all religious traditions. In any case, religion consists of many dimensions (ideological, ritual, ethical, etc.) – not just this inner dimension of experience (cf. Glock & Stark, 1965).

Another analysis of the FBOs from another viewpoint or from a more general view on religion would be more inclusive for FBOs related to other congregations. Moreover, these typologies limit themselves to *observable* expressions of religion, neglecting unobservable beliefs and motivations (Jeavons, 2004). Occhipinti (2013) rightly states that typologies conceal as much as they reveal by privileging some dimensions over others.

A third point of criticism we have regarding the existing typologies, closely linked to the previous one, is that when typologies are comparing different organizations on the basis of their religiosity (Sider & Unruh, 2004; Cnaan, 1999; Clarke, 2006, 2008; Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015; Monsma 1996, 2003), they treat religion and religiosity as a *monolithic* category – as if all religions function in exactly the same way. Differences found among FBOs are, however, not only attributable to differences in the degree of religiosity of these organizations but also to the different religions (with their different organizational structure, their different views on poverty and poverty relief, …) that are involved (see Kirmani, 2012; Malcom, 2012; Cascale et al., 2010). We agree with Cameron (2004) when he points out the importance of understanding what FBOs really believe in and looks for a method to study *specific* beliefs. We would add, though, that not only specific beliefs should be studied, but also

specific *norms, values, practices, ...* that constitute the specificity of each religion and shape the way poverty aid is approached by a religiously inspired organization or initiative. For example, as Du Toit (2019) already stated, FBOs use religion-specific ways to mobilize staff and volunteers. According to Mitchell (2016), who points to the importance of the theological premises of FBOs, it is simply impossible to construct a typology that takes all faith traditions into account. We fully agree and conclude that the existing typologies (and probably typologies as such) are not really useful when comparing organizations and initiatives from different religious backgrounds.

A fourth criticism we like to put forward is the fact that some typologies include a category for secular organizations (Sider & Unruh, 2004; Monsma, 2003; Lengel & Holdsworth, 2005). By doing so, *all* the secular organizations working with people in poverty, are put in this category, suggesting in a way that this is a homogenous group with no essential differences between them – which is of course not the case. Moreover, and more importantly, it is quite strange to include this category in a typology of FBOs as secular organizations simply do not fit the general definition (they are *not* faith-based at all).

As a fifth criticism, we find it is important to point out the very specific background of the typologies presented so far. Clarke's (2006, 2008) typologies, even though widely used, were initially developed within the context of *development aid*. The other typologies discussed here stem from a *US* context that is quite different from that in Europe. Europe, a patchwork of quite different welfare states, for one does not have this clear and specific law regulating the funding of FBOs in this particular way (Maes et al., forthcoming); the interaction between state and civil society is also very different in both contexts (van Dam et al., 2022). Moreover, religion has lost ground in several European countries due to extensive secularization, whereas the majority of US

residents are religious (van Dam et al., 2022; Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Beaumont & Cloke, 2012)

As a final criticism, it is of course important to look *beyond* the religion or the religiosity of an organization or initiative when examining and comparing FBOs (Kirmani, 2012; Kose, 2019). Religion -already, as shown above, a complex category itself- is only one of several variables that shape the identity and activities of FBOs. As in our scoping review we not only examined the existing typologies, but also looked at the variables that are used to distinguish between FBOs, we were able to come up with a much larger list of variables that can be used to distinguish FBOs from one another – variables that not only refer to religion, but also to the kind of solidarity that is offered, the way the initiative is structured or organized and the location of the initiative (see below).

The criticisms above and the fact that are so many different variables involved when doing comparative research on FBOs, bring us to the conclusion that it is in fact impossible to construct a typology that is still simple enough to be useful when doing research on FBOs. We indeed believe that we have to transcend a typological approach and look beyond them in order to compare and correctly identify differences between FBOs. We agree with Mitchell (2013) when he states that the problem with the existing typologies is that they try to simplify a complex phenomenon. The variety of existing variables is indeed far too great to allow for a meaningful typology. Moreover, it is important to realize that there are no different 'species' or 'subspecies' of FBO or ontological differences between categories and subcategories of FBOs that could be distinguished when looking at FBOs from a specific perspective while singling out specific variables.

From fixed types and typologies to a flexible multi variable-approach

After having collected and studied all the variables used in the different articles, we were able to classify them into four major categories we respectively named 'religion', 'organization', 'solidarity' and 'location'. In each main category we could distinguish different subcategories that are briefly defined in Table 2 below. We added (between brackets), the number of articles of our scoping review in which this particular subcategory was used. Earlier, in table 1, column 3, we showed which variables were used in each of the articles with, between quotation marks, the exact terminology used in the articles themselves. The table we thus constructed can be used as a working instrument to research FBOs in the field – it is however not a determination table that would enable to distinguish different types of FBOs with specific innate characteristics.

TABLE 2 – overview of variables

Category	Subcategory	Description
Religion	Congregation (24)	Which religion, denomination or congregation is involved?
	Link to congregation (13)	Is the FBO a religious congregation, a working group / organization run by a religious congregation, or an independent working group / organization?
	People (10)	Do board / management / staff / volunteers / members / clients belong to the denomination involved?
	Context (6)	What is the broader religious context the FBO operates in (religious freedom, religious diversity, secularization, …)?
	Objectives (8)	Which specific religious objectives (if any) does the FBO have?
	Activities (5)	Which specific religious activities (if any) does the FBO organize?
	Importance of religion (1)	How visible/present is religion in the routine operation of the FBO (premises, activities, …)?
Solidarity	Type (18)	What kind of solidarity do the FBO offer (basic needs, housing, work, study, children, …)?
	Sector (16)	Does the FBO work in a specific sector (poverty aid, health care, childcare, youth care, translocal aid…)?
	Clients (18)	Who is helped by the FBO ((specific) communities, (specific) families, (specific) individuals, …)? Only people belonging to the own religious community or denomination?
Organization	Funding (12)	How is the FBO funded (state, members, congregation, …)?
	Size and scope (9)	What is the size and scope of the organization (number of (staff) members; local/regional/national/international/global scope)?
	Type (10)	What type of organization is the FBO (formal or informal; profit or non-profit; …)

	Staff (7)	What types of staff does the FBO have (paid and/or voluntary)
	Relations (6)	How is the relation between the FBO and the authorities and between the FBO and other FBOs and secular organizations with a similar mission (good/bad, active/dormant, …)?
	Context (13)	What is the broader context (political, legal, institutional, economic, cultural, …) the FBO operates in?
	Embedding (6)	How embedded is the FBO in the location/community it is active in?
Location	Specific location (21)	Which continent, country, region, city is the FBO active in?
	Type of location (18)	Is the FBO active in the city, the periphery and/or the countryside?

We chose to divide the variables found in our scoping review into four broad categories: Religion, Solidarity, Organization, Location. In research on FBOs (or RSIs), we think religion is the first and most important category – as it is their religious character that distinguishes these initiatives from other initiatives in this area. If there is no religious inspiration involved (clearly present in its vision, mission and/or goals), it is pointless to use the term FBO or RSI when discussing a certain initiative. But at the same time there can be huge differences between FBOs or RSIs in the way this religious inspiration manifests itself. From our scoping review we learned that when comparing FBOs different *religious aspects* can and should be taken into account. Apart from the more general and simple question as to which religion, denomination or congregation is involved in the FBO, six more subcategories that all discuss the religious aspects of FBOs could be identified. Our second subcategory 'Link to congregation' looks at *how* the FBO is connected to a religious group or congregation. The third subcategory

describes the connection between the *people* involved in the FBO (members, volunteers but also staff) and the religion/congregation involved. The fourth category looks at the religious *context* in which the FBO operates: Is there religious freedom? What about secularization and religious diversity? The fifth category looks at the religious *objectives* of the FBO (is there for instance a missionary goal?). The sixth category focusses on *religious activities* of the FBO (does the FBO for instance organize or facilitate religious rituals?). The final category investigates the role of religion within the organization in a more general way by looking at the visibility and presence of religion within the *daily routine* of the organization (e.g. religious symbols in the buildings or the fact that meetings are started with a prayer). Though some of these items could be constructed in such a way that they could be scored (e.g. religious symbols in the buildings, yes or no; number of religious activities per location per week, …), several essential items (e.g. which religion or congregation is involved; what is the religious context) do not lend themselves to such a quantitative approach. As a result it is simply impossible and it would be at the same time quite meaningless to come up with a non-contextual general classification (let alone ranking) of FBOs according to their religiosity.

We explicitly included solidarity in our term religion-based solidarity initiative (RSI) as solidarity is an objective that is clearly present in every religiously inspired initiative discussed in the articles we reviewed, but strangely lost in the term FBO itself (Maes et al., forthcoming). Solidarity could, inspired by Stjernø (2004), be defined as the willingness to aid others based on feelings of shared fate. Solidarity and its subcategories appear 52 times as a variable to study and compare FBOs in the studies we reviewed. Therefore, our second category to look at when studying FBOs is *solidarity*. Though it seems evident to include this category when comparing FBOs,

only half of the articles and none of the typologies included solidarity as a category. We divided the category solidarity into three subcategories: what type of solidarity are we talking about (housing, work, …)? In what sector(s) is the FBO active (health care, youth care, …)? Who are the clients (individuals, families, members of the religious community, …)? Because of the nature of the items involved, regarding solidarity too it is simply impossible to come up with an overarching classification of FBOs.

Although we had expected most comparisons of *faith*-based organizations to be based on *religious* elements, we found that in the articles included in our scoping review, most of the variables used actually belong to the category *organization* (63)**.** For many authors, the organizational structure of FBOs is indeed an important category for comparison (Hackworth, 2010; Littlefield, 2010; Skjortnes, 2014). The influential typologies we discussed earlier focus on this specific element of FBOs as well. In our list of variables, we certainly do not neglect the *organizational* category. However, in the subcategories we identified and use, unlike many articles and typologies studied in our review, we do not take a formal organizational structure for granted. The broader subcategories we chose within the category organization enable us to include also small, bottom-up initiatives and forms of religiously inspired solidarity that does not have the formal structure of an organization (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019). From the preliminary results of our own fieldwork in Flanders, Belgium we learned that in migrant churches and religious congregations solidarity numerous solidarity initiatives are taken that do not lead (or have not yet lead) to the development of separate and/or more formal 'organizations' but at the same time prove to be clear examples of effective religiously inspired solidarity. Though we don't believe that it would be possible to construct an overarching classification or typology of FBOs based on a unified (and completely decontextualized) category 'Organization', this category nevertheless remains

important in research on FBOs. It is absolutely relevant to look at how for instance FBOs are embedded in the local structure, what their relationship is with the government or what kind of staff they are using.

Within our final category, *location*, we focus on the geographical and urban or non-urban context (Kose, 2019; Olarinmoye, 2012) in which an FBO operates. Indeed, this context exerts a great deal of influence on the way an FBO functions (Kirmani, 2012; Grieve & Oliver, 2018; Kose, 2019). FBOs working in the same context but involving different religions may have important similarities; while at the same time there may be huge differences between FBOs affiliated to the same denomination but operating in a completely different location on the other side of the globe.

Conclusion

We started our analysis by identifying the most common typologies used to distinguish FBOs in the field of poverty reduction or alleviation (Sider & Unruh 2004; Clarke 2006, 2008 & Monsma 1969 & 2003). Taking all our criticisms into account, however, we conclude that typologies are not the most ideal way to compare and study FBOs. Being inevitably one-sided, typologies create blind spots in research, exclude and obscure informal organizations by focusing too hard on organizational characteristics, and take little or no account of the context in which FBOs operate. The field of FBOs is too complex to allow for the construction of an overarching typology that takes into account the many relevant specificities involved. We therefore, as an alternative, propose to forget about typologies and instead develop a set of variables that can be used to compare and study FBOs. Depending on the type of research, one or more variables can then be chosen, on the basis of which FBOs can be compared. Thus, we can stop pigeonholing FBOs and study religion-based solidarity initiatives in a way that does

justice to the manifold ways in which religion and religions have cared and are still caring for people in poverty and need.

From our research it has become clear that a typological approach of FBOs is not helpful in identifying and highlighting the myriad ways in which religions and religion-based initiatives contribute to poverty reduction and thus not helpful to increase awareness among social workers regarding the role played by religion. Using typologies of FBOs and using the term FBO itself as umbrella term in social work practice would create too much focus on *formal* organizations and force religious initiatives into a straitjacket tailored to NGOs, but not to the many, very diverse and also often small-scale and informal initiatives emerging from a religious inspiration. Instead of opening the eyes of social workers, the exact opposite is the result: a blind spot is created that overlooks an important segment of informal and small-scale actors who often matter as potential partners for the social worker. The more open framework we have developed can be a tool for social work practice and also for research on social work and religion to better recognize and acknowledge the wide variety of religious initiatives that contribute to poverty alleviation.

Disclosure

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare

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