

Chapter 5: Faith-Based Organisations and Organised Religion in South Africa and the Nordic Countries

5.1 Introduction

Religion is incorporated into diverse organisational forms that perform different roles in different contexts. This is especially obvious when comparing the Global North to the Global South, or the Nordic countries to South Africa. While the majority of the population in both settings declare their Christian affiliation, this membership is enacted in different ways and with different meanings attached to it. This chapter provides a general background for understanding the organisation and meaning of religion in the respective countries focused upon in this book and, by doing so, offers a conceptual framework for what is meant by faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the case studies presented in the second part of the book.

We begin by offering a working definition of the term FBO. FBOs could be examined at an international, national or local level, and the organisational forms and primary goals may differ between the levels. As the discourses and strategies developed at the international level inevitably influence the local level, we first deal with FBOs in relation to the theme of development and civil society on the broader, international and national levels. Then we move onto the local level and tease out connections between FBOs, communities and individuals in some of the recent literature. In the second half of the chapter we look at the broader religious context in which FBOs function in South Africa and the Nordic countries in order to gain a more context-relevant sense of the playing field of FBOs in the case study contexts reflected in this book.

5.2 The Term Faith-Based Organisation

As a term, FBO is a rather recent coinage, and there is a lack of consistency in how the term is defined and used by scholars. The term emerged in an international context shaped by the rise of civil society and the increasingly visible role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the 1980s, as well as a growing interest from donors and policy-makers in the work of religious actors some years later (see Burchardt: 2013; Jones & Petersen: 2011; Occhipinti: 2015; Tomalin: 2012). Part of the religious sector responded to the pro-faith climate by aligning their

organisational structures to fit into NGO-shaped civil society, for instance, by creating non-profit organisations (Burchardt: 2013, 42–43). The growing visibility of the actual term FBO in international discourses in the 2000s “coincided with a rise in awareness of the resurgence of religious activity in public life globally” (Tomalin: 2012, 692). The different and at times conflicting definitions were not merely the result of academic bickering, for, among other things, defining the boundaries of FBOs started to matter more and more from a policy perspective (Tomalin: 2012, 691).

Against this background, it is no wonder that researchers are divided on whether or not churches and other faith communities in themselves – not only non-profit organisations attached to and run by churches – fit under the rubric FBO (see Clarke & Jennings: 2008a; Leuers: 2012; Occhipinti: 2015; Tomalin: 2012). A clear fault line lies between those who reserve “FBO” only for NGO-like organisations, and those who include faith communities (such as churches or congregations) or their various activities, such as Sunday schools. Yet the variation between different NGO-like FBOs is also significant (see e.g. Occhipinti: 2015). With the case studies in Part II of this book in mind, we agree with Tomalin (2012, 694) that differentiating between FBOs that are NGO-like and those that are not, but have been involved in social work for hundreds of years (e.g. churches), can easily become an artificial distinction.

Since our book wants to broadly speak to the role of organised religion in the context of NEET youth (that is, youth not in education, employment or training – see Chapter 2), we opt for a definition that also includes churches and other faith communities because of the potential of such a broad definition to allow “a fuller consideration of FBOs as a category of actors” (Occhipinti: 2015, 342) in thinking about social cohesion. For this purpose, Clarke and Jennings’s general phrasing serves as a starting point: an FBO is “any organisation that derives inspiration and guidance from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith” (2008b, 6).

In other words, for the case studies in this book faith has to be an identifiable aspect of an organisation’s vision or the carrying out of its mission in order for the organisation to be defined as “faith-based”, although the actual organisational forms may vary. For instance, in the Lammi case study the research participants mostly spoke of the local Lutheran parish, while in the Pretoria case study the young people spoke of both churches and the NGO-like Tshwane Leadership Foundation. Opting for a broad definition therefore allows us, first, to focus on the religious actors that the young people themselves talked about and found important in their neighbourhoods regardless of their organisational forms or aims, and second, to compare the role of organised religion in the case study settings despite the differences between the FBOs. Differentiating between different kinds or typologies of FBOs (e.g. Occhipinti: 2015) is thus not central to this book as a whole. While

we have opted to embrace the broad field of organised religion in our definition of FBOs, the more particular characteristics of the actual FBOs that the case study chapters engage with give nuance to and illustrate the variety among faith-based actors.

5.3 FBOs in the Context of Development and Civil Society

FBOs have been receiving increasing attention in development practice and discourse (see Jones & Petersen: 2011; Occhipinti: 2015). The interface between the concepts “faith” and “development” has become an important theme and reveals a need to negotiate the position of FBOs in the field of international development (Clarke & Jennings: 2008b, 1). As a result of the increased interest in religious actors, the actual cooperation between FBOs and donor agencies has also increased (Clarke: 2008, 39–40). However, such cooperation can be challenging, especially because of the prevailing binary opposition between the sacred and the secular in the discourses of development and international relations (Linden: 2008, 72). Some views and practices regard religion as an antithesis of development, while the constitutional separation of religion and state in “modern” or “rational” public policy-making has deep historical Western roots (Clarke & Jennings: 2008b, 4; Occhipinti: 2015).

Nevertheless, the role of FBOs in development is being recognised not only by academia (see Jennings: 2013; Jones & Petersen: 2011; Occhipinti: 2015; Rae & Clarke: 2013), but also by governments, other policy-making agencies and donors. For example, the South African government recently established the National Interfaith Council of South Africa (NICSA) as the official forum through which a partnership relationship between the country’s religious sector and the state should be promoted. This umbrella body and its predecessor, the National Interfaith Leadership Council (NILC) replaced the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF) in a series of events since 2009 (Swart: 2013b, 100–101). On the other hand, studies in the WREP (2003–2006) and WRIGP (2006–2008) projects¹ that engaged with various countries (including South Africa, Finland and Norway) (Bäckström et al.: 2010; Bäckström et al.: 2011; Swart et al.: 2012) found that the state and FBOs (here Christian churches in particular) struggle to effectively manage their relationship in pursuit of mobilising FBOs as welfare agents (see Angell: 2010; Pettersson: 2011; Middlemiss Lé Mon et al.: 2012; Pessi: 2010; Pettersson & Middlemiss Lé Mon:

1 WREP = “Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective: A Comparative Study of the Role of the Churches as Agents of Welfare within the Social Economy;” WRIGP = “Welfare and Religion in a Global Perspective: Theoretical and Methodological Exchange across the North–South Divide.”

2012; Swart: 2012). The complexities of the FBO–state relationship are further illustrated in Swart’s (2010; 2012) critical reflection on the pragmatic turn in the social development debate promoted by the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFSA) and, in particular, his criticism of FBOs focusing too much on gaining state funding for development projects, and not enough on critical engagement with the government’s economic and developmental approaches. Overall, historical links between church and state are under pressure in the countries studied, while new forms of collaboration challenge the way churches are involved in society (Pettersson & Middlemiss Lé Mon: 2012, 309), as will be further elaborated on in the sections below on religion in South Africa and the Nordic countries.

5.4 Roles of FBOs in Local Communities

In line with the focus of this book on FBOs within local communities, we now look more closely at the functioning of FBOs at the local level and, in particular, at the characteristics of FBOs that may influence processes of inclusion and exclusion. Connections between FBOs, local communities and individuals feature in recent scholarship on religion and development from at least three perspectives, which are discussed in this section: the organic or “rooted” relations between FBOs and local communities; the role of FBOs in community formation or sustenance; and the role of FBOs as channels through which individuals meet each other’s needs and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. All three aspects also feature in the context of the case study chapters in Part II of this book, which thus further complicate and nuance both the critique delivered against FBOs as well as their reported positive potential in communities as discussed by scholars and reviewed briefly here.

First, scholars writing on religion and development note the rootedness of FBOs in local communities and their connectedness at the grassroots level (Burchardt: 2013, 41; Krige: 2008, 23; Leuers: 2012, 708; Moyer et al.: 2011, 983). Because we opted to include local faith communities (such as churches) in the definition of an FBO, such rootedness becomes even more evident. As and through local faith communities, FBOs are able to tap into existing pools of potential volunteers, beneficiaries, funds, moralities and so on. Some portray this connection as a special asset and imply that this ability is not necessarily present in so-called secular NGOs. This embeddedness has, for instance, been said to increase efficiency in carrying out developmental tasks (Clarke & Jennings: 2008a), and from a moral and motivational perspective, FBOs can be seen as having access to the “moral energies” of communities (Clarke: 2007, 90). Generalised claims of such an advantage, however, have been criticised for their lack of comparative empirical support and because it is difficult to discern the actual difference between faith-based and

secular organisations and their impact (Leuers: 2012, 708; Tomalin: 2012, 696–700). Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of the perceived community link, such a link, nonetheless, clearly characterises the nature of FBOs.

Second, attention has been devoted to the role of faith in creating relationships and in the formation of collective identities or a sense of belonging and unity (Bornstein: 2005; Bradley: 2009, 107; de Cordier: 2009, 678–679; Haynes: 1997, 713–714; Haynes: 2007). This, of course, comes close to saying that FBOs impact positively on social cohesion. However, the other side of the coin has also been noted, namely the potential of religion to contribute towards social exclusion and divisions (Clarke: 2007, 84; Krige: 2008, 23). In other words, the sense of belonging of individuals and social groups to a faith community, as well as the broader local community, may be either facilitated or retained depending, for instance, on how the limits of belonging are perceived within a given religious framework. Moreover, when looking at the development and welfare activities of FBOs, any physical distance that might exist between those who fund FBO activities and the intended beneficiaries (see Bradley: 2009, 110) further problematises the actual role of FBOs in creating communal relationships and the limits to those relationships. In the South African context, in particular, a similar concern could be raised about physical and social distance between racial, ethnic and other groups of people within faith communities.

Third, FBOs can play a very concrete, functional role in providing a channel for the charitable giving and faith-based actions of individuals (Bradley: 2009, 110; Sanchez: 2010, 110). In other words, FBOs can provide individuals with a particular kind of lifestyle, offer building blocks for a shared morality, and comprise a community within which to enact their morality. For example, FBOs can be a source of motivation to change one's own challenging life situation (see Skjortnes: 2014, 77–78). And participating in faith communities can also provide individuals with access to social capital, that is, to social networks and systems of reciprocity and trust (Moyer et al.: 2011, 988). Such networks may prove to be beneficial and effect a sense of belonging in other social spaces beyond the immediate faith community itself.

Besides being aware of these roles that FBOs play in local communities, thinking about FBOs in local communities also involves the different philosophical-moral notions linked with being human and the potential implications of these notions and discourses for everyday life. At times, also in the research literature, the “African” person is strongly associated with the notion of communalism, while the “Western” person is linked with rationality and individualism (see LenkaBula: 2008, 384; Shutte: 2001). These fundamentally different ways of approaching human existence have implications for understanding notions such as religion, community and social cohesion. By focusing on specific contexts in South Africa and the Nordic countries, the discussions in this book highlight the micro-contextual nature and the possible

mixing and reconstruction of these notions. As an example, in the South African urban context the competition between communal ideals and an “I am what I have” notion of subjectivity (see Eze: 2011) importantly calls for a closer examination of the moral frameworks of young people in particular.

5.5 The Religious Context of FBOs: Religion and Religious Affiliation

In the context of the case studies in this book, many FBOs that the young people spoke of are the Christian churches with which they themselves were affiliated. In the Riverlea local community, for instance, the authors engaged with young people who identified with and attended Catholic, mainline Protestant and Pentecostal churches, while in the Lammi community the research team spoke with, among others, Muslim asylum-seeker youths and young people who had chosen to leave the Lutheran Church. The following section on organised religion in South Africa and the Nordic countries locates both the personal narratives of these young people and the various kinds of FBOs within the broader religious environment.

Before looking at the specific country contexts, the notions of religion, spirituality and religious affiliation call for clarification. The categorisation of organised versus non-organised forms of religion is relevant when introducing the concept of spirituality, which is often erroneously associated only with non-organised religion. In popular usage, at least in the Western world, and at times also in scholarly writing, religion is referred to as something organised, as opposed to spirituality (Ammerman: 2013, 258–260; Ellingson: 2001, 257–260). Ammerman, however, points out that this division does not do justice to the complexity of the relationship between religion and spirituality, and stresses that spirituality is “neither a diffuse individualised phenomenon nor a single cultural alternative to religion” (Ammerman: 2013, 258). These definitions imply that spirituality is also an aspect of organised religion and in that sense part of what we explore in our case studies later in this book.

Furthermore, our choice to explore the role of religion among young people in the context of specifically FBOs is not an indication that religion is limited to, or more authentic in, these spaces than in less organised settings; and nor does our emphasis indicate an understanding of a homogeneous religious experience within a given FBO. Rather, we have decided to position our exploration within the context of organised religion in order to provide policy-relevant findings, in particular, on the role of organised religion (particularly FBOs) vis-à-vis marginalisation of the youth.

The term religious affiliation is linked to organised religion. It is commonly understood as the religious grouping with which an individual chooses to identify (Klingenberg: 2014, 42–46). Such affiliations can be indicated in various ways, for

example, through census data or registered membership. However, such data are not fully reliable and even the term “religious affiliation” is quite problematic. For example, in Africa it is common practice to have multiple religious affiliations, although they might not all be official (Ellis & Ter Haar: 1998, 177–178). This is also true of South Africa, and to a certain extent of the Nordic countries, where official affiliation is often linked to the majority churches, although many also attend the minority Christian communities (Furseth et al.: 2017).

Furthermore, neither registered membership nor census data can indicate the level of involvement of the individual, and many people fail to cancel their membership when they no longer associate with the group. Yet, while recognising the complexity and ambiguity of the term religious affiliation, it is nevertheless used as a tool in understanding the religious landscape of the countries being studied. For instance, census data still provide the most nuanced analysis of religious data in South Africa, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Erasmus: 2012, 45). Moreover, we use the data that are available. In South Africa the last census to include a question on religious affiliation was conducted in 2001, although the 2013 General Household Survey included two questions on religion (Schoeman: 2017, 3). In the Nordic countries, on the other hand, registered membership is a more reliable reflection of religious affiliation.

5.6 Religion in South Africa

In South Africa citizens overwhelmingly identify as religious. In the 2001 census, only 15 per cent stated they have no religious affiliation. Almost 80 per cent stated that they are Christian: 32.6 per cent belonging to mainline churches, 31.8 per cent to independent churches, 5.9 per cent to Pentecostal churches, and 9.5 per cent to “other” Christian churches. Judaism (0.2 per cent), Hinduism (1.2 per cent), Islam (1.5 per cent) and Eastern or other religions (0.9 per cent) are small minorities (Statistics South Africa: 2004, 24). The General Household Survey, conducted by Statistics South Africa since 2002, is a representative survey of non-institutionalised and non-military persons and households in South Africa (Schoeman: 2017, 3). The findings of the 2013 General Household Survey, while not surveying as comprehensive a sample of South Africans as the national census, is nevertheless relevant to this study as it asked questions on religion. During the survey 92.6 per cent of South Africans identified as having a religious affiliation. With the categories of affiliation differing from those in the 2001 census questionnaire, the majority identified as Christian (84.2 per cent). Ancestral or traditional African religions (5 per cent), Muslim (2 per cent), Hindu (1 per cent), and Judaism (0.2 per cent) were small minorities (Schoeman: 2017, 3). Thus, taking into consideration the last census to

ask about religious affiliation, as well as the most recent representative survey to do so, we see that South Africans as a people can be described as very religious.

However, the nature of the religious landscape is complex. Tracking census data from 1911 onward shows that there is an increase in Christianity, particularly African Indigenous, Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical Christianity, and a move away from mainline Christian churches (Chipkin & Leatt: 2011; Erasmus: 2012; Schoeman: 2017). As on the continent at large (Ellis & Ter Haar: 2004, 1; Uzodike & Whetho: 2008, 198), Pentecostal churches are on the increase and increasingly influential (Anderson: 2005; Burchardt: 2011, 669). There is also an increase in the numbers of people with no religious affiliation, particularly among those younger than 35 (Erasmus: 2012, 52).

However, high rates of religious affiliation do not necessarily mean that FBOs as a sector of civil society are influential. On the contrary, FBOs, in particular mainline churches, in South Africa are generally accused of little public social engagement (Kumalo & Dviza: 2008; Maluleke: 2010; Mkhathshwa: 2007; Winkler: 2008) and the South African state is experienced as demarcating FBOs only as spiritual and moral actors, and not as change agents (Winkler: 2008, 2100). Some argue that this is to a large extent the fault of FBOs, and here in particular faith communities, as they are hampered by competing faith identities, exclusionary ideologies, turf struggles and a lack of community development capacities (Winkler: 2008, 2100).

However, one should take note that the post-apartheid era is a difficult one for FBOs to negotiate, especially for mainline churches. Since the end of apartheid, church involvement in politics has become more diverse and the mainline ecumenical movement has become weaker (Bompani: 2006, 1138; Cochrane: 2009; Kuperus: 2011, 279). While during apartheid churches were defined by their affirmation, condemnation or neutrality on apartheid, the post-apartheid era offers many different approaches or responses to state action (Kuperus: 2011, 284). Some argue that in the first years of the democratic dispensation ecumenical churches tended to align themselves with the state, but have since then become more independent and critical of the government (Bompani: 2006, 1138; Swart: 2013b). Thus, there are signs of a re-emerging FBO sector that engages critically with social issues. Two ecclesial letters, issued in 2012 and 2013, for instance, critically addressed the ruling government and its practices, and were backed by FBOs and FBO networks such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC), The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA) and the Church Leaders Consultation. These letters could be seen as a potential sign of a renewed *kairos* or critical consciousness in the present-day socio-religious landscape (Swart: 2013b, 86–88). However, it is also important to note that politicians have at times read such criticism of the ruling party's discourse or actions as "abandoning the struggle" against apartheid and its legacy (Bompani: 2006, 1142).

Nevertheless, FBOs still have the potential to significantly impact on South African youths. So, for instance, a recent South African study identified religion as an important source of resilience amongst young people, as it fosters positive behaviours and provides them with emotional and social support, coping skills, a sense of external and internal purpose, a connection to the past and a moral compass (Brittian et al.: 2013). However, one should not unequivocally assume that religious teachings and principles determine the behaviour of their youthful adherents. Various studies have illustrated how youths act in ways that directly conflict with the teachings and expectations of the FBOs with which they affiliate (Brittian et al.: 2013; Burchardt: 2011; Eriksson et al.: 2013; Garner: 2000; Mbotho et al.: 2013).

5.7 Religion in the Nordic Countries

Historically, the Nordic countries have constituted homogeneous spaces with regard to religion as a result of little inward migration, and because the Lutheran Church used to be the state religion/church, also known as the “religion of the throne” (Bruce: 2000, 34). The state church status, however, has officially changed. In Norway this change came about as recently as 2012, but in Finland it had occurred officially already in 1870 (Høeg & Krupka: 2015, 235; Seppo: 1998). Nevertheless, in practice the situation in Finland is still very close to the state church situation (Seppo: 1998). The late nineteenth-century industrialisation and the growing differentiation in the Nordic countries had produced a model in which religion was increasingly privatised and located in the private sphere, while the growing number of social tasks for which the state and municipalities assumed responsibility, such as welfare provision, were located in the public sphere (Bäckström: 2005; Botvar: 1993).

In all of the Nordic countries the majority of the population belongs to the national Lutheran churches. In this chapter we use the statistics collected by the NOREL project.² With respect to membership in the majority churches, in our Nordic case study countries the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Norway follow very similar trends. In the year 1988 membership of both churches was 88 per cent of the total population and in 2014 74 per cent in Finland and 75 per cent in Norway (Furseth et al.: 2017). Other previous research calls membership in the Lutheran churches to be a civil religious phenomenon, which makes the church a symbol of nationality and national culture (Sundback: 2007).

2 The NOREL project (2009–2013) compared religious changes during the past twenty years in all five Nordic countries. See more on the project at www.kifo.no. The final publication of the project was published in 2017; see Furseth et al.: 2017.

During recent decades the above-mentioned public/private division has become more and more blurred, not least as a result of migration. Immigration of people of other religious traditions has increased considerably during the last thirty years, to varying degrees in the different Nordic countries. Moreover, the Nordic countries in general are noted as societies that are influenced most by values such as individualism and self-development. This explains why immigration contributes towards making religion more visible in the Nordic public sphere (Botvar & Schmidt: 2010) and towards a need to rethink the public role of FBOs in society (Bäckström: 2014, 61). Immigration has increased the membership of Christian minority churches and of the Muslim communities, but still their membership as percentage of the total population is very small. According to NOREL statistics, the increase of membership of Christian minority churches in Finland rose from 2 per cent to 2.3 per cent from 1988 until 2014, and during the same timeline from 3 per cent to 6.6 per cent in Norway (Furseth et al.: 2017). The increase of membership in Muslim communities has been somewhat more rapid, even though the baseline numbers in 1988 were very low. In Finland and Norway respectively only 770 individuals and 0.3 per cent of the total population were members of Muslim communities. One reason for these very low numbers is that membership is not very common among the Muslim populations. Many more attend mosques than are actually official members in these communities. In 2014 Muslims in Finland formed 0.2 per cent of the population, but in Norway it was as high as 2.6 per cent (Furseth et al.: 2017). The increase in Norway is significant and has influenced the Norwegian religious situation since then.

It is, in any case, important to note that the national churches continue to perform many public roles in the Nordic countries. For instance, in most of these countries the national churches remain responsible for the maintenance of cemeteries (Kasselstrand & Eltanani: 2013, 106–107). Moreover, the Nordic Lutheran churches are still significantly tied to the state on the financial and administrative level (Kääriäinen: 2011, 159–161). These public roles of the national churches, the strongest FBOs in the Nordic countries, seem to suggest that the churches and the state are still strongly connected in the two Nordic countries focused upon in this book (Kasselstrand & Eltanani: 2013, 107). In line with the private nature of religion in the Nordic countries, religion has been almost invisible in research on the living conditions of young people. Even though religion has, for example, been one of the categories of Norwegian youth studies and even though the studies show that many more young people with immigrant and non-Christian background consider religion important in their life, religion and FBOs are not mentioned as resources (Øia: 2005; Øia & Vestel: 2007).

Also revealing the influence of the Lutheran churches is a Nordic study that suggests a correlation between church affiliation and trust in the state in the Nordic countries. The findings of Kasselstrand and Eltanani show that members of the

national Lutheran churches trust the state the most, more than members of minority religious groups do, both Christian and non-Christian. Other Protestant Christians trust the state less than the Lutherans do, but still more than those who indicated no religious affiliation (Kasselstrand & Eltanani: 2013, 110–115).

5.8 Conclusion

The discussion on FBOs and religious affiliation in this chapter provides a background for our case studies on the role of FBOs in strengthening or weakening social cohesion among young people in the Nordic countries and South Africa. The brief introduction to the religious context of South Africa and the Nordic countries exposes historical and contemporary religious landscapes that differ greatly from one another. Such contextual diversity is one reason why we have opted for a broad definition of the term FBO, following the often-quoted formulation of Clarke and Jennings. More importantly, though, this broad definition allows the case study authors not to predefine their focus, but rather to develop an empirically informed sense of how organised religious actors impact on the lives of the young people who participated in the research.

The conversation of this chapter continues in different ways in the rest of the book. While studying and categorising particular FBOs themselves in detail has not been an aim in the book, as the reader will discover, interesting differences between faith communities and NGO-like FBOs emerge in the case studies and further explain why scholars debate and disagree on the definition of FBO. As will also be seen in the case studies, the academic perceptions on the various roles of FBOs in local communities that have been briefly discussed in this chapter resonate with and are further complicated in these local contexts. Moreover, the chapter has shown that the results of the case studies are relevant beyond the context of studying FBOs and young people: the findings of the case studies also contribute to the broader academic discussion around the relevance, irrelevance, meaning, and positive and negative potential of religion and FBOs in both international and local contexts.

Part II

Case Study Perspectives

