Faith standing out? Discovering the particularities of faith-based antitrafficking organizations in Thailand and Cambodia

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Faith standing out? Discovering the particularities of faith-based antitrafficking organizations in Thailand and Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

While there are some studies mapping non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs) responses to human trafficking, insufficient attention has been devoted to antitrafficking responses of Faith-Based Organizations (FBO). To remedy this gap, this article surveys 59 antitrafficking organizations through the analysis of their websites, assessing their level of faith-infusion and mapping their antitrafficking strategies. To identify the distinctiveness of FBOs, these are compared to their secular NGO counterparts. The survey shows that compared to their secular NGO counterparts, FBOs tend to focus more on the post-trauma stages of interventions and that FBOs tend to have individual and church-based donor networks. To further explore these patterns, I draw on qualitative case studies of three Christian FBOs in Thailand and Cambodia. Together, the survey and the case studies suggest that FBOs approach antitrafficking in a distinct spiritualized way, in particular for FBOs with higher degrees of faith-infusion. Faith is seen as an added value but employed in varied ways in antitrafficking; from integrating spirituality in programmes to de-emphasizing religious identity in favour of the theory of change emphasizing collaboration. The former illustrates the resistance to the secular paradigm while the latter illustrates adaptations to the same.

KEYWORDS

Faith-based organizations; NGO; antitrafficking; Thailand; Cambodia

Introduction

Despite a growing recognition that faith-based organizations (FBOs) are playing a potent role in shaping societies (Fountain & Juul Petersen, 2018), a prevailing secular bias (Petersen & Le Moigne, 2016; Tomalin, 2012), leads to a limited understanding of the role of FBOs. Increasingly, researchers are beginning to explore the variety of ways in which FBOs play a role in fields such as humanitarian aid (Horstmann, 2011; Parsitau, 2011), peace building and transitional justice (Haynes, 2013; Jeffery et al., 2017) and development aid (Clarke, 2006; Fountain, 2013; Jones & Petersen, 2011; Tomalin,
This paper adds to this emerging literature through an analysis of the field of antitrafficking. While there are some studies mapping NGO responses to human trafficking (Foot et al., 2015; Limoncelli, 2016), not enough attention has been devoted to mapping and understanding the antitrafficking responses of FBOs. There is no extensive mapping of the prevalence of faith-based antitrafficking actors, however, one study indicated out of all the antitrafficking organizations in the United Kingdom (UK) 30% were FBOs (Lonergan et al., 2021). There is evidence to suggest that Christian FBOs do have an extensive involvement in antitrafficking, indicated by their impact on antitrafficking policy and discourse (Zimmerman, 2011), as well as by their prevalence in this study. In addition, FBOs are backed up by considerable funds, studies suggest that in the US alone, $5 billion is raised yearly for overseas missionary and Christian development work (Haugen, 2019). Previous research has found that FBOs are struggling to maintain their religious identity while operating in a secular arena (Lonergan et al., 2021), yet many of them view themselves as uniquely apt to take on the issue of trafficking (Graw Leary, 2018). Studies on FBOs suggest that they are largely focusing on service delivery to victims and less on advocacy and campaigning activities (Lonergan et al., 2021). However, there is a need to learn more about the characteristics and potential distinctiveness of antitrafficking FBO practices. Learning more about FBO responses to human trafficking, and its effects and consequences, is an essential part of understanding the varied response to human trafficking and how different actors relate to each other. Knowing what is being done, and what is specific for different types of actors, is critical for both policy-makers and practitioners but also provides novel insights for research on antitrafficking.

This study contributed to a better understanding of the distinctiveness of faith-based antitrafficking work through an analysis of the focus and activities of faith-based as well as secular antitrafficking organizations in Thailand and Cambodia. These countries have a high prevalence of trafficking (Davy, 2013) as well as the significant concentration of antitrafficking NGOs. In fact, Thailand and Cambodia are both on the top ten list concerning the number of antitrafficking organizations (Limoncelli, 2016). This study will contribute to expanding the knowledge on a vital segment of the response to human trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia by comparing faith-based and secular NGOs. To learn more about the faith-based response to human trafficking I explore the following questions: (1) What does a Christian response to human trafficking look like? (2) How does it differ from that of secular NGOs? (3) How does faith shape the antitrafficking work of Christian FBOs?

These questions are examined through a two-step analysis. Firstly, through a website analysis of 59 organizations I shed new light on general patterns of what a Christian response to human trafficking looks like and how it differs from that of secular organizations. The website analysis shows two main patterns distinguish FBOs from secular NGOs: FBOs focus more on protection than secular NGOs, emphasize rescue, shelter, restoration and repatriation activities (protection); and there is a clear difference in donor patterns between FBOs and secular NGOs, where FBOs are funded by individuals, churches and other FBOs, and secular NGOs are funded to a higher degree by institutional donors and other NGOs. To explore the meaning, causes and effects of these patterns more in depth, I conduct case studies of three Christian antitrafficking FBOs, which
allows me to examine how these patterns are manifested in practice, and explore the role of faith in shaping FBOs’ antitrafficking work. Secondly, the analysis of three Christian antitrafficking FBOs, provide opportunities to see the nuances from the general patterns, and add novel insight into how faith shapes the antitrafficking work of FBOs. My analysis thereby adds to the existing literature on antitrafficking, as well as the literature on FBOs.

Next, the paper proceeds by situating the study in relation to existing knowledge about how FBOs engage with antitrafficking and how we can study them. Thereafter, I discuss the methods used. I then discuss what sets the FBOs apart, before further exploring these characteristics in more depth through the three case studies. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for future research, as well as for antitrafficking practice.

FBOs as Antitrafficking Actors – Situating the Study

This study adds to the literature about antitrafficking responses, exploring who the actors are, what they do and why. Particularly, I add to the literature by exploring what is known about FBOs, and FBOs as antitrafficking actors. Regarding antitrafficking responses, previously it has been found that sex trafficking is a significant focus in the general trafficking response but that labour trafficking is also prioritized by a significant portion of the antitrafficking organizations. Furthermore, researchers have noted that many organizations tend to focus on more than one issue, and a significant finding is that prevention is an important focus, while protection is less emphasized. Furthermore, awareness raising is a common activity although studies disagree slightly on how prevalent it. These findings are important benchmarks for comparison with the antitrafficking work of FBOs (Foot et al., 2015; Heiss & Kelley, 2017; Limoncelli, 2016), which will be discussed in the methods section.

In terms who the actors are, the most prevalent type of actors are NGOs (54%), followed by governmental agencies (10%), while 4% were religious organizations (Foot et al., 2015). This 4% can be contrasted by Lonergan et al.’s finding that 30% of the antitrafficking organizations in the UK are FBOs (Lonergan et al., 2021). Further clarity is thus needed. Importantly, Foot et al. did not consider whether they were religious NGOs, and if so, what kind of what level of faith-infusion they had (Foot et al., 2015). The problem that Foot et al. has, though, is that NGOs were assumed to be non-religious, while indications hint that many NGOs actually are FBOs (Davis, 2019; Tomalin, 2012). In fact, five out of the ten largest international development alliances were faith-based (Haugen, 2019), pointing towards the substantial financial contribution that FBOs can be credited with. Other donor categories include corporations, churches, individuals, governments, inter-governmental organizations and NGOs (Banks & Brockington, 2020).

As this study focuses on FBOs, it should be noted that the study of religious organizations or FBOs is complex, and previous research has made attempts to capture their essence, and categorize it satisfactorily, as will be discussed here. Before doing so, take note that my assumption is that religion and faith influence practices, and that FBOs are a relevant category to study (as discussed by Frahm-Arp, 2010); Freeman, 2018; Tomalin et al., 2019). Yet, even though I assume that faith is relevant to study, I do not assume that the influence is always positive (Harrelson, 2010), or that there are
clear cut dichotomies between religious and secular (Smith, 2017). Understanding that FBOs to a large extent are operating in a context dominated by secular discourse, which influences how FBOs present themselves publicly, is an important departing point (Lonergan et al., 2021). Tomalin uses the term dual register to describe how FBOs shift between religious and secular modes of communication (Tomalin, 2018). In the context of UK, a study saw evidence that some of the FBOs distanced themselves from their faith identity to gain funding or established credibility in policy-influencing with secular partners. This interplays with desires to downplay particularism in favour of inclusion. The authors theorize that there may be a trade-off between faith distinctiveness and professionalism among FBOs. They conclude that the antitrafficking sector in the UK is not post secular as does not equally value faith and secular identities. Thus, FBOs which are pivoting towards professionalization may have more commonalities with professionalized secular organizations than they would with other more distinctive FBOs (Lonergan et al., 2021). My research contributes to the field by adding a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of antitrafficking FBOs in terms of their faith-infusion, what these varied actors are occupied with, and exploring what that response looks like, and how faith interacts to shape the response.

Even if the significance of faith is stressed, it is important not to oversimplify FBOs as a category and recognize its versatility. To properly take in the full scope of FBOs, as well as any type of organization, it is important to identify the mandate, values, practices and partners of a given organization (Haugen, 2019). In order to capture the nuances and diversity of FBOs it is helpful to use the typology of faith-based organizations developed by Sider and Unruh (2004), which essentially allows for capturing nuances regarding self-descriptive texts, affiliations, staff recruitment and religious environment, but also the role of faith in actual programming. Organizations are categorized in terms of their degree of faith-infusion; secular, faith-background, faith-affiliated, faith-centered and faith-permeated. Making use of these nuances in approaching FBOs will allow for a deeper understanding and appreciation of how FBOs operate in antitrafficking work in Cambodia and Thailand.

Relatively few studies have been conducted on the antitrafficking work of FBOs. Even though interest in the role of religion in development assistance has increased in recent years, there is more to understand about FBO responses to human trafficking. However, important insights have been reached about the links between Christianity and the focus on sex trafficking in policy debate (Zimmerman, 2011, 2013), which has been supported by subsequent studies indicating a disproportionate, but not exclusively, focus on sexual exploitation of women and children by FBOs (Lonergan et al., 2021).

Christian organizations view human trafficking as a social ill that they are particularly called to combat. Furthermore, FBOs are strongly represented among the single-issue antitrafficking groups (Lonergan et al., 2021). A few studies seem to indicate that Christian organizations engaging in antitrafficking see their spiritual world-view as an advantage, and make use of a faith-related approach (Frame, 2017; Author, forthcoming). It is often the care aspects in relation to victims that are emphasized (Lonergan et al., 2021) and some FBOs believe that full restoration of victims may be impossible without religious transformation (Pinkston, 2019). Secular organizations, on the other hand, may include religion more as culturally embedded elements (Frame, 2017). However, there are similarities between the secular NGOs and the FBOs in what types of outcome the different
organizations sought, and Frame suggests that both FBOs and secular NGOs seek conversion to their respective world views (Frame, 2017). This points to the need to make more close-up observations of FBOs to understand them better.

Instrumental and value-based motivations are emphasized by secular NGOs and FBOs alike. Even though there are several similarities, the values of FBO staff often were expressed in religious terms, in contrast to the NGOs. The differences in how motivations are expressed are accounted both from infusion of faith – but without systematically analyzing this aspect – but also from the context that they operate in (Frame, 2019). These points about the level of faith-infusion and how these interact with the local contexts are key departing points in my research and will be used to study FBOs with more precision and nuance, by using sub-categories of FBOs inspired by Sider and Unruh discussed above (Sider & Unruh, 2004).

**Methods**

In this study, I employ a comparative design and draw on a mix of methods to explore the characteristics of antitrafficking FBOs in Thailand and Cambodia. First, I make use of an online directory for antitrafficking organizations to conduct a survey where secular NGOs and FBOs are compared. The directory has an expressed purpose to help users to find local organizations to donate time, skills or resources. The directory does very light curating of the information and therefore preserves the voice of the organizations presented there. Without an annual fee for being listed, the list is not pruned, and some organizations’ websites were not updated. At the time of searching, there were 27 organizations in Thailand and 21 organizations in Cambodia. This is a sizeable part of the total number of antitrafficking organizations for each country, 1/3 for Thailand and 1/5 for Cambodia, according to other estimates (Limoncelli, 2016). In addition to these organizations, when encountering new organizations through searching the websites, ten organizations were added, making the total number of antitrafficking organizations in the sample 59. These additions have added to the number of FBOs, and faith-centered FBOs in particular, in the analysis, which is important to consider. No inference can be made about the overall sizes of the groups, since the sample is not randomly selected. Yet, we can get valid insights into the particularities of FBOs compared to NGOs. In the directory, there is an English-speaking bias, leading to an underrepresentation of small and local organizations. There is an additional Western bias since the organization behind the directory primarily aims towards an American audience. However, these biases are not expected to affect the inclusion of FBOs more than secular NGOs.

The information available on the directory, the organizations’ websites and any links to other affiliated websites were used for the analysis. The collective information available then informed the process of categorizing the organizations’ focus on trafficking, antitrafficking activities/strategies, main target groups, funders and partners, and mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original categories by Sider and Unruh</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Faith-background</th>
<th>Faith-affiliated</th>
<th>Faith-centered</th>
<th>Faith-permeated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My adaptation</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Faith-affiliated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Adaptation of Sider and Unruh (2004) faith categories.
and vision. Categorization was based on, but not limited to, previous studies’ suggestions for categorization (Banks & Brockington, 2020; Foot et al., 2015; Frame et al., 2019; Heiss & Kelley, 2017; Limoncelli, 2016). In addition, the organizations were categorized by the level of faith infusion, using Sider and Unruh’s typology (2004). However, I simplify it by merging categories according to Table 1. To exemplify, faith-affiliated organizations have ties to religious communities of faith, and have both implicit and explicit references to faith and religion. Religious activities are optional and not extensive, and religious experience is not seen as necessary for the desired outcome. Faith-centered organizations have explicit religious references, and have affiliations to religious communities of faith. In addition to acts of compassion and care, the programmes also include explicitly religious content which may be segregated from provisions of care, and beneficiaries may also be invited to religious activities outside the programme parameters.

The codes are summarized in Table 2. This allows for useful comparisons of the findings to other studies, but above all, it aids the analysis in regards to what categories to look for. The information from the websites was coded to make use of descriptive statistics in a statistical programme, for example, cross tabs and bar charts. The statistical programme allowed for comparison from several different perspectives. To distinguish the specific characteristics of FBOs, they are compared to secular NGOs, and I only consider larger differences, while smaller differences are considered as no difference between the categories. The analysis relied on the available information on the websites and the available information varied between the different organizations. There may be errors in categorizations due to outdated or lacking information on the websites. Categorization was only made based on found evidence. It is possible that some organizations have been wrongly categorized due to the limited information available, or because they have omitted certain activities. Possible biases are that some faith-affiliated organizations may have been mischaracterized as secular, or that some faith-centered organizations have been categorized as faith-affiliated. In the process of categorization some organizations have been re-categorized from a secular to a faith-based organization after finding information ‘deep down’ on the website. On occasion, when indications pointed towards faith-based identity, but no conclusive evidence was found, then founders and leaders of the organization was googled, sometimes leading to a re-categorization of the organization

### Table 2. Coding scheme for comparative analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Inspired by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antitrafficking strategies:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inspired by</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention; Protection; Prosecution</td>
<td>3P paradigm (e.g., Graw Leary, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donor type:</strong></td>
<td>Banks and Brockington (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate donors; Church; Individuals; GOV/Inter-GOV; NGO; FBO</td>
<td>Foot et al. (2015) Heiss and Kelley (2017), Limoncelli (2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antitrafficking activities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment; Employment/voc. Training; Repatriation; Research; Legal assistance/prosecution; System strengthening; Volunteers; Rescue; Aftercare; Shelter/safe house; Awareness; Social enterprise; Policy-making</td>
<td>Foot et al. (2015), Heiss and Kelley (2017), Limoncelli (2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of trafficking:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex trafficking; Child labour; Labour trafficking; Forced marriage; Gen. trafficking or several</td>
<td>Foot et al. (2015), Heiss and Kelley (2017), Limoncelli (2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target group:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women; Men; Both; Minorities; Migrants; Children</td>
<td>Foot et al. (2015), Heiss and Kelley (2017), Limoncelli (2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faith affiliation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular; Faith-affiliated or Faith-centered</td>
<td>Adapted from Sider and Unruh, (2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from a secular NGO to FBO. It is challenging to categorize organizations’ level of faith-infusion due to a tendency for some FBOs to hide behind secular discourse and de-emphasize their faith-identity (Lonergan et al., 2021).

The second part of the study consists of case studies of three Evangelical-Christian FBOs working against human trafficking in Cambodia and Thailand. The three FBOs were strategically chosen, prior to the online directory search, so that they would be diverse in terms of their level of faith-infusion (Sider & Unruh, 2004). Other factors included cases from different geographic contexts within Thailand and Cambodia, considering both source areas as well as destination areas of trafficking. All three FBOs have been started by Western organizations or individuals, but are moving towards increased localization/nationalization. Collectively they represent large parts of the heterogeneous make up of Western-led Evangelical-Christian FBOs working against human trafficking. In combination, the overview and the case studies have provided an in-depth understanding of the FBOs’ operations and perspectives.

The case study material is used to further explore how patterns found in the survey with regard to the distinctive characteristics of FBOs are manifested in their work. To accomplish this, I interviewed 17 staff members of FBOs. Furthermore, to get a comprehensive understanding of the FBOs, I also interviewed other actors about the work of the three FBOs; 8 NGO representatives, 7 government officials, 3 donor representatives and 23 community members and/or beneficiaries. Almost half of the respondents were women, and 1/6 of the community members/beneficiaries were below 18 years old.

Participants were selected based on whether or not they have knowledge on the subject of my interest, for instance, if they live in the area of project implementation, are participants in the project, or have insight into mandate, values and mission of the studied FBO. Many of the beneficiaries and community members have been selected by the organizations themselves, but there have also been instances where more spontaneous interviews took place in connection to observations. Due to Covid-19-related restrictions, most of the interviews with FBO staff were conducted online. Interviews with community members and beneficiaries were conducted in Thailand and Cambodia, with the help of interpreters. The interviews focused on the respondents’ understanding of human trafficking, the local context, the response to human trafficking and their opinion about the work of the FBOs, and how it differs from other organizations’ responses. In addition, 21 observations of the organizations and their activities have been conducted, travelling with the staff of the FBOs; observing project activities, offices and meeting with staff there. The objective of the observations was to take note of informal practices and routines, symbols and dynamics between the participants and the staff.

The case study material was coded with an abductive approach. Some codes have been inspired by previous studies on NGO activities against human trafficking (Foot et al., 2015; Frame et al., 2019; Limoncelli, 2016; Samarasinghe & Burton, 2007) but new codes have been added as additional concepts and activities have emerged. The codes allow for easy comparisons to the website analysis. To go beyond the website analysis, the codes from the case study material were categorized into clusters; activities/strategies, thoughts on own role, advancements opportunities (what they do, what added value they bring and what they want to do in the future), target groups and type of trafficking. Memos have been written throughout the coding process to capture emerging ideas and patterns.
The codes were analysed on an overall level to detect general patterns but also for each individual organization to avoid overgeneralization. In addition, the cases have been compared with the website material, as well with previous research on the topic. The analysis here brings contextualized and nuanced understanding of what the Evangelical-Christian response to human trafficking may look like. Combining the website comparison with the case studies, provides opportunities for both detecting patterns, but also to explore the content of those patterns. Informing the analysis of the case study materials is Smith’s suggestion to consider how material influences (funding, aims, partners and major activities) and sacred influences (theory of change, values, views on development) interact to produce outcomes and shape the work (Smith, 2017). In addition, Sider and Unruh’s faith typology have been used (2004).

The whole process, from study design, interviews, coding and analysis is influenced by my own positionality (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) as a European middle-aged male, with extensive experience from faith-based development work in Asia. My position has aided in getting access and gaining participants’ trust but has also helped in understanding certain contexts, and recognizing veiled religious concepts. Language and cultural barriers have been managed through the use of interpreters.

**Findings**

Below, I first present the findings from the website analysis, pointing to two main patterns that distinguish FBOs from secular NGOs; their focus on protection and their specific donor patterns. Thereafter, I explore these patterns in depth through the case studies of three FBOs working in Thailand and Cambodia.

**Comparing Antitrafficking FBOs and Secular NGOs**

When the 59 organizations in the website survey are divided into sub-groups, I find that 30 are secular NGOs, 8 are faith-affiliated FBOs and 21 are faith-centered FBOs, indicating that FBOs are prevalent in the field of antitrafficking. Nine out of the ten organizations that were added through snowballing techniques to the sample from the online directory were faith-centered, which may indicate that highly faith-infused organizations are reluctant to be present on mainstream platforms, but rather network amongst themselves.

The first major clear difference between FBOs and secular NGOs that I find is that FBOs tend to have a greater emphasis on protection compared to secular NGOs, as highlighted in bold in Table 3. This trend could be due to how the problem of trafficking is understood by FBOs compared to secular counterparts. Studies comparing secular and religious organizations have suggested that secular organizations tend to focus more

**Table 3.** Comparison between faith categories: Intervention strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention strategy</th>
<th>Faith category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secular (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: % of org. in each category using strategy. No rows or columns expected to add up to 100%.
on legal justice compared to social justice for religious organizations (Butcher & Hallward, 2018).

When looking at specific activities, FBOs generally tend to have more activities and be less specialized. Furthermore, FBOs stand out in the focus on rescue, shelter and repatriation (protection), which tend to be activities that relate to each other. But also, aftercare, social enterprise and employment/vocational training are standing out compared to their secular counterparts (protection). This is consistent with findings in the UK, where FBOs emphasized providing services to victims (Lonergan et al., 2021).

The activities that make the secular NGOs stand out compared to FBOs are the foci on awareness raising (prevention) and policy-making. These patterns could reveal the emphasis on changing structural issues among secular NGOs while the FBOs are more locally grounded and focus more on individuals or smaller groups. This can be linked to ideology and problem representations of human trafficking as a spiritual problem at the individual level (e.g., Henriksson, 2021). Secular NGOs focus considerably more on child labour compared to the FBO group. Other than that, both secular NGOs and FBOs have a relatively minor variations in focus with regards to the type of trafficking or target groups. This is unless the faith-affiliated groups are compared with the secular and faith-centered groups, as the faith-affiliated group have much greater emphasis on sex trafficking, which will be discussed later on.

The second major difference revealed in the comparison concerns donor patterns, that is, from which sources they receive funding, as shown in Table 4. As indicated by the bolded numbers, FBOs rely on churches, individuals and other FBOs, while the funding for secular NGOs is primarily from NGOs and government or intergovernmental donors (GOVs/inter-GOVs), and they rarely get funds from churches. NGOs are more likely to get funds from FBOs, than FBOs are to get funds from institutional donors. Less than half of the secular NGOs receive funding from individual donors, a stark contrast to the high reliance on individuals by FBOs. In later sections, the differences in donor patterns will be discussed in more detail.

When comparing the two sub-groups of FBOs to each other (faith-affiliated and faith-centered) there are some interesting patterns emerging. The faith-affiliated group shares many similarities to secular NGOs, while the faith-centered have relatively few things in common with secular NGOs. Faith-affiliated resemble secular NGOs in terms of how much they focus on employment/vocational training, research, legal assistance, system strengthening and social enterprises. They also have similar patterns concerning how often men and children are highlighted, and in their focus on labour trafficking. They

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith category</th>
<th>Secular (%)</th>
<th>Faith-affiliated (%)</th>
<th>Faith-centered (%)</th>
<th>FBOs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporations</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVs/Inter-GOVs</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBOs</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: % of org. in each category receiving funds from sources of funding. No rows or columns expected to add up to 100%.

Table 4. Comparison between faith categories: source of funding.
are also similarly likely to have NGOs as donors. This suggests that the level of faith infusion plays a role in shaping the response to trafficking in various ways. Secular NGOs and faith-centered FBOs differ in most activities, except for research, system strengthening and volunteers where there are minor differences in how common these activities are. This is also true when it comes to donor patterns. In essence, the faith-affiliated FBOs are a ‘middle-ground’ NGO which in some aspects resemble a secular NGO, while in other aspects resemble the faith-centered FBO. This can give them opportunities to work across the secular-religious divide. Adding to the nuances between the FBOs, it is the faith-centered group which primarily focuses on employment/vocational training, and connected to this is a priority of creating social enterprises where people (victims) can get employment. One possible reason for this clear emphasis is the desire to offer dignified alternative employment to sex workers, which has been theorized as something closely connected to Christian sexual morals (Rodríguez-López, 2018; Shih, 2018; Zimmerman, 2011). But, contrary to the logic of the above explanation, the faith-affiliated group focus more on sex trafficking and child labour compared to the faith-centered group. This indicates that faith (sacred influences) interacts with other (material) influences to shape their work (Smith, 2017), as will be elaborated on later. In terms of donor relations, the faith-affiliated group has the most diverse donor base as they seem to get funding from all the categorized sources and are the most successful at getting funds from corporations, individuals and NGOs. Faith-centered antitrafficking organizations excel instead in getting revenues from churches and FBO donors but also have a clear focus on individuals. These differences in donor relationships likely contribute to the differences between the faith categories.

The Christian Response Explored

Now I turn to exploring in-depth what the Christian-Evangelical FBO response to human trafficking looks like. I start by briefly describing the three case study organizations. I then use the patterns that emerged from the website survey as points of departure, to further examine the specifics of the antitrafficking work of FBOs, and how faith plays a part in shaping their response. To gain additional nuances, I will make use of the original categorization of FBOs (Sider & Unruh, 2004) when discussing the case studies.

Introducing the Cases

FBO1 is a faith-affiliated Christian-Evangelical antitrafficking organization. This organization sees collaboration, capacity building and system strengthening as key components in their strategy. They view faith as a positive force, but also recognizes it as a divider. Thus, they de-emphasize their faith identity to increase possibilities for collaboration. It has a mixed funding base, but receives considerable funds from FBO donors channelling institutional funds.

FBO2 is a faith-centered Christian-Evangelical development organization, with antitrafficking as one of its focus areas. FBO2 has a clear Christian identity, does not engage in any proselytizing, but attempts to find ways to engage with religion and religious leaders in constructive ways for the benefit of community development. They view being a role model for society as a good way of living out their beliefs, and want
to organize civil society from below to prevent trafficking, as well as by pushing authorities to act. FBO2 is relatively small, and is funded by primarily FBO donors channeling institutional funding from states in the Global North.

FBO3 is a faith-permeated Christian-Evangelical antitrafficking organization focusing on sex trafficking, and on post-exploitation stages. They use faith to strengthen the rehabilitation services they offer to their clients. While being very clear about the organization’s faith identity, the staff at times de-emphasize this identity to avoid negative reactions from their surroundings. They emphasize building relationships in the community, and with their clients. FBO3 is mostly funded by churches and individuals but also has a social business.

**Protection Strategies of the FBOs**

The comparative analysis above showed that FBOs focus considerably more on the restoration phases of antitrafficking compared to secular NGOs, and that this is especially clear with regards to faith-centered organizations. One possible reason for this is that these FBOs are given a chance to deploy their full arsenal of tools, including spiritual ones, when it concerns the healing and restoration of victims of abuse. This is in line with previous studies, suggesting such tendencies (Lonergan et al., 2021). The FBOs themselves see the potent force of religion, and the added advantage of understanding faith and religion in society is emphasized and credited to the organizations’ effectiveness relative to secular actors. At the same time, they are striving to make use of faith in an inclusive way.

A so-called ‘holistic understanding’ is emphasized by all three studied FBOs, essentially meaning that all aspects of human needs, in particular spiritual needs, are considered. This holistic emphasis is underscored by the website analysis where it was found that FBOs tend to do more things, while secular NGOs are more specialized. But while spiritual needs are seen as more of a contextual necessity for two of the FBOs, one intertwines spirituality in their programming in concrete ways, and in particular in the restoration parts of their work. This includes having daily devotions, weekly Bible-studies and ongoing mentoring of their clients. It is viewed as an essential part of the restoration process to reshape the victims’ view of themselves, using religion to emphasize that they are loved, reinforced by devotions, worship songs, Bible studies and counselling. The library in their office includes several books on Christian counselling and on spirituality. The office walls have signs with biblical references and Christian symbols. According to the organization’s own estimates, about half of their clients decide to convert to Christianity, indicating that conversion is important for the organization’s programme.

The FBOs also show signs of nuanced views of faith, as they recognize its positive and unifying, but potentially also divisive role, and even abusive potential. There is an awareness of the existence of ‘Bible thumpers’ who deploy spirituality in a negative way. They also share stories of how representatives of faith, Christian orphanages, or Monks in Pagodas, misuse positions of power to exploit people, and create bondages of victims (Harrelson, 2010). Attributing this to shallow, or fake, faith, is a common way of reconciling such events to a faith-infused world view, which in some instances also applies to explain why believers enter the sex trade or become victims. Participants discuss the
potential for traffickers to exploit religious beliefs of current or future victims such as karma/dharma (in Buddhism) and witchcraft and fear of evil spirits (Animism/syncretistic Buddhism). Yet, the FBOs’ solution is not less religion but to offer spiritual counselling, where fear of these dark forces can be overcome. Through this, they are not entirely rejecting the victims’ original beliefs but instead recontextualizing their beliefs, emphasizing the power of Jesus (Pinkston, 2019).  

Employment and vocational training were slightly more emphasized by the FBOs compared to the secular NGOs, and among the thee FBO-types considerably more by the faith-centered group. When analyzing the three Christian antitrafficking organizations, it becomes clear that employment and vocational training is a crucial part of the restoration process, and thus the focus is on creating alternative employment to sex work and/or exploitative situations. Often employment is seen as pivotal for restoring dignity, and is thus therapeutic, which acts as an example of how beliefs and ideas about what a dignified life is shape the intervention (Rodríguez-López, 2018; Shih, 2018; Author, forthcoming). The concept of dignity is a recurring theme among all the three case studies. The link between dignity and employment of trafficking victims can be understood as the sacred influences of the organizations interacting with the material influences and thus incorporating beliefs and values into antitrafficking projects (Smith, 2017).  

The website analysis also revealed that social businesses were much more common in the faith-centered group, practiced by almost half of the sample, indicating a correlation between the Christian world view and the desire to offer alternative employment (Zimmerman, 2011). The employment is mixed with mentorship, counselling (including spiritual) and is thus an example incorporation of beliefs in programming. This desire for comprehensive mentorship is elaborated by a leader of a faith-centered organization:  

‘And so, why do we have this business? Because it gives us access to the women five days a week […] And that we’re a place that allows that space for the healing, the growth, the processing that is needed for them to really reintegrate fully.’  

It is also part of the repatriation process, where business grants allow the repatriated victims to start a small business based on the vocational skills they have acquired.

**Faith-based Funding Patterns**

The website analysis revealed a striking difference in donor patterns between FBOs and secular NGOs. FBOs were very much funded by individuals, churches and other FBOs, while secular NGOs relied more on institutional donors and other NGOs. The pattern for funding of FBOs is consistent with the case studies, revealing a considerable reliance on either individual donors and churches, or other FBOs. Relying on individual donors and churches is not necessarily a financial bad bet for the FBOs. Many of the largest international development alliances are faith-based (Haugen, 2019) and the distance to institutional donors gives them certain freedom to act outside the institutional donors’ prevailing policies and priorities (Davis, 2019; Petersen & Le Moigne, 2016). It should be noted, however, that substantial institutional funds are channelled through intermediate FBOs to these FBOs. However, individual and faith-based donors have their own specific demands that the FBOs need to relate to. One participant recalls a conversation
with an individual donor where the message that she preferred to donate to rescue operations was conveyed: ‘This little old lady […] in America said to me, oh, isn’t that terrible that [FBO] doesn’t do rescue anymore?’

The reliance on individuals and churches may to large extent be by choice of these organizations, but there is also an element of expulsion worth discussing. Interviews with representatives from the antitrafficking sector confirm that there is a suspicion towards Christian antitrafficking organizations and how some of them use faith in their work. At the same time, it is increasingly more difficult to access institutional donors, as the larger professionalized organizations take a substantial part of the funds available (Banks & Brockington, 2020). To have a chance at all, there is a pressure to become increasingly ‘professionalized’ and to adopt dominant international development discourses. Professionalization is not, however, viewed as something desirable by all FBOs. On the contrary, one participant describes that it risks making the organizations less inclined to address the expressed needs of the clients due to donor restrictions and administrative requirements, linking this trend to secular organizations; ‘Sometimes I find that the more professional people […] the less accessible their services are’. That this statement comes from an FBO with a high reliance on individual and church donors perhaps illustrates the mechanism that segregates some FBOs further away from institutional donors, and some towards them. All FBOs have experienced negative reactions to their own faith from their surroundings, and a pressure to professionalize. Often, the negative reactions are credited to misconceptions and stereotypical views of Christians. To deal with this, they de-emphasize their Christian identity in certain contexts so that they are taken more seriously, for example in their social businesses, or when engaging in outreach activities. The felt need to professionalize antitrafficking aligns with the secular discourse on faith and development (Ager & Ager, 2011; Tomalin, 2012).

The leader of faith-affiliated FBO2 is deeply engaged in dialogue with secular antitrafficking organizations, researchers as well as institutional donors. As have been discussed, these relationships influence how the organization wishes to present itself; ‘[W]e should have maybe moved completely out of that [religious identity], if we wanted to be fully professional.’ This statement aligns with observations which reveal that this process of de-emphasizing faith identity is tangible; there are hardly any religious signs or symbols in their office, and no religious practices or routines are observed in their implementation. Instead of adding non-Christian religious symbols to reflect inclusiveness, the religious symbols in the office are absent, further indicating that secular norms are seen as neutral (Berg & Lundahl, 2017). However, this de-emphasizing of religious identity is completely in line with the organization’s values, theory of change of collaboration with everyone, and complex view of faith. The Christian identity, however, lingers on through their long-term Christian staff, creating some mild tension in the identity of the organization. As such my observations and themes in interviews confirms theorized choices of FBOs between their faith-identity and professionalism (Lonergan et al., 2021).

**Awareness Raising and Policy-making According to FBOs**

The website analysis revealed that secular NGOs emphasized awareness raising and policy-making to a higher degree than their faith-based counterparts. While the faith-
permeated FBO3 fits with this pattern of relative de-emphasis on policy-making and awareness raising, the other two (faith-centered and faith-affiliated) do not. When returning to the website comparison and considering the specific types of FBOs, however, the differences on policy-making are smaller between faith-affiliated FBOs and secular NGOs. This is consistent with the case studies, where the faith-centered and the faith-affiliated FBOs are more engaged in changing policies. In the case studies, there is evidence of how faith interacts with other sacred as well as material influences such as theory of change and donor relationships to shape the specific strategies that they employ, as will be discussed below.

According to conversations with staff from the faith-permeated FBO3, they are choosing not to pursue awareness-raising strategies because they question its effectiveness, but also because they had a higher calling to work in protection. This is a reflection of how religious (sacred) influences are fused with material influences to shape strategy (Smith, 2017). The other two FBOs, categorized as faith-centered and faith-affiliated, both emphasize awareness raising, policy-making and advocacy. Both view such strategies as essential parts of their theory of change and strategies, and it is worth noting that both receive institutional funding via intermediate faith-based donors. Religious leaders, and faith, are important in their advocacy and awareness raising. Through this, commitments to donor’s wishes and their faith identity are combined. Illustrating this, FBO2 engages with Buddhist monks to reinforce the message of antitrafficking, and lending legitimacy to the project from monk’s Buddhist teaching, and is one way of taking community’s faith seriously and employing it for the benefit of the intervention. Furthermore, being a role model to society is an important aspect of how they view their role in society. Both FBOs make use of soft advocacy (Arvidson et al., 2018), meaning that they have a partnership role with the government, an extension of their role modelling aspirations. This connects with the non-political stance of many other FBOs (Banks et al., 2015), but is also a necessary adaptation to the conditions of restrictive governments of South-East Asia. This ability to merge expectations from various stakeholders help when creating a diverse coalition of partners, as the website analysis showed that a majority of all faith-affiliated had all types of donors, while a sizeable minority had institutional donors, and is another example of the dual registers employed by FBOs (Tomalin, 2018).

**Conclusion**

In this paper, through a comparative research design, I have explored the differences and similarities between FBOs and their secular NGO counterparts, both in terms of what they do, and how they do it. My approach of using both a website analysis of 59 organizations and case studies of Christian antitrafficking organizations has allowed me to both detect general patterns, and uncover what these patterns mean in practice. In this concluding section, I will highlight the main findings, and discuss their implications for furthering the research field.

I find that there are differences between FBOs and NGOs in terms of what they focus on, even though the differences are not always substantial. The main difference revealed by the survey is that FBOs emphasize protection rather than pre-trauma intervention, which is in line with suggestions that Christian organizations often provide services to
victims, as they feel that they have a special calling for this, and believe that spiritual healing is necessary to help victims of trafficking (Frame, 2017; Lonergan et al., 2021; Pinkston, 2019). This includes focusing on rescue and shelter, but also restoration. My findings indicate that employment and vocation training are integrated strategies of FBOs restoration work. Furthermore, the analysis finds that FBOs have different donor patterns, relying more on churches, individuals and faith-based donors than their secular NGO counterparts.

The findings provide a more nuanced picture of which type of FBOs are operating in antitrafficking. When using more nuanced categories introduced by Sider and Unruh (2004), a better and richer picture emerges; FBOs focus on slightly different strategies in a distinct spiritualized way – and increasingly so when they belong to the more faith-infused categories – where holistic transformation is linked to dignified work and inner healing. These are novel perspectives that I bring to the field of antitrafficking. This tendency is considerably weaker for faith-affiliated organizations. In fact, faith-affiliated FBOs resemble secular NGOs in their focus, indicating that professionalization, linked to institutional donors and their requirements contribute to this (Davis, 2019; Lonergan et al., 2021). Faith-affiliated FBOs display mastering a dual register (Tomalin, 2018), enabling them to effectively communicate to both communities of faith, and to secular audiences. The analysis also shows that they have the most diversified donor base out of the three groups, where dual registers are necessary to use.

Furthermore, there is a tendency of ‘shy FBOs’, supported by the fact that FBOs to a lesser degree were available on the online directory but could easily be found by references from the FBOs that were present on the website. The case study points in the same direction and a likely reason for this is the secular paradigm, where there is a choice of being viewed as professional or religious (Lonergan et al., 2021). My finding adds that when values of the organization emphasize collaboration, and faith is viewed as a divider, this can motivate de-emphasizing a religious identity. It is thus a combination of the secular ideals, and own core beliefs that interact (Smith, 2017). At the same time, some FBOs deal with this secular idea in the opposite way, by further investing in their faith identity, and thus possibly excluding themselves from the mainstream development discourse. One of the uniting factors of Christian FBOs are donor profiles: individuals, churches and other FBOs (Davis, 2019). The Christian FBOs of all levels of faith-infusion take faith seriously, and mostly see it as an added value; either through engaging religious leaders, or as motivational factors for the staff (Frame, 2019). The FBOs show examples of using their religious worldview to engage with communities for positive change, sometimes by confronting harmful religious practices. Role modelling in society is an additional way to express faith without proselytizing.

More research is needed to look into how various relationships, for example, donors, are shaping the operations of Christian antitrafficking organizations, and how these organizations navigate the various material influences – demands and expectations – that are placed upon them (Smith, 2017). There is also need for additional studies on how Christian antitrafficking organizations are perceived and received, and how Christian antitrafficking organizations engage with these varied reactions.
Notes

1. https://www.endslaverynow.org/about
2. IBM SPSS 28
3. Interview FBO1-Staff 2
4. Observation FBO3-O2
5. Interview FBO3-Staff 5
6. Interview FBO3-Staff 5
7. Interview FBO2-Staff 3
8. Interview FBO2-Staff 1; Interview FBO3-Staff 4
9. Interview FBO3-Staff 1
10. Document FBO1-Doc 9; Interview FBO1-Staff 1; Interview FBO3-Staff 1
11. Interview FBO3-Staff 1
12. Document FBO1-Doc 9
13. FBO2-Relationship Map; FBO1-Relationship Map; FBO3-Relationship Map
14. Observation FBO2-O5; Interview FBO1-Staff 1
15. Interview NGO2
16. Interview NGO1; Interview NGO2; Interview NGO4; Interview NGO5
17. Interview FBO3-Staff 1
18. Interview FBO3-Staff 5
19. Interview FBO1-Staff 6; Interview FBO1-Staff 2
20. Observation FBO1-O6
21. Interview FBO1-Group
22. Interview FBO3-Staff 2
23. Document FBO1-Doc 1; Document FBO2-Doc 4
24. Observation FBO2-O5
25. Interview FBO2-Staff 3
26. Interview FBO1-Staff 2

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