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Religious Discourse And Social Development: Conceptual Debate On The Role Of Faith-Based Organizations

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Abstract:
This paper examines the complexity of the role of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in religious-state relations, challenging the binary narrative that portrays FBOs simply as "opposition" or "partners" of the state. Through a multidisciplinary literature review, the research reveals three key dynamics: (1) Contestation as an arena for authority and public space, particularly in secular-assertive (France/Turkey) or authoritarian (Zimbabwe/New Order Indonesia) countries; (2) Collaboration in a complementary, integrative, and adversarial-collaborative model that navigates the dilemma of dual accountability; (3) The role of Brokerage-Translation, where FBOs bridge sacred-secular values through reframing, filtering, and hybridization mechanisms (e.g., the transformation of zakat in Egypt, the concept of Islamic family planning by NU). Theoretically, the researcher rejects functionalist reductionism and Western epistemological bias that perpetuate the religious-secular dichotomy. Instead, researchers propose a hybrid perspective—viewing FBOs as liminal actors who manage tension through semantic adjustment in an "in-between space." This position is strengthened by Habermas's post-secular framework for recognizing religion as a public force while acknowledging the risks of neoliberal co-optation. Implicitly, the study of FBOs should transition from a rigid approach to a micro-contextual analysis that captures value negotiations in the process of policy translation.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and modernisation has existed since the earliest sociological theories were introduced, one of the most influential being the secularisation thesis that predicted the decline of religion in modern society (Wilson & Bruce, 2016).

This theory of secularisation was revisited in the second half of the 20th century by scholars who argue that the social significance of religion is diminishing in modern society, that religion has shifted from the public sphere to the private realm, as well as becoming more autonomous through a process of "structural differentiation" (Parsons, 1966). However, the enduring resilience of religion has sparked widespread criticism of secularisation theory (Stark, 1999), with one of the originators of this theory writing that "the assumption that we live in a world that has already been Secularization is wrong" and stating that "the entire literature of historians and social scientists, loosely called the theory of secularization, is fundamentally wrong" (Berger, 1996).

The emergence of FBOs globally serves as tangible evidence that challenges the classical secularisation thesis, which predicts the decline of religion in the modern public sphere. The theory of secularisation, influenced by the thoughts of Weber and Durkheim, argues that modernisation will push religion into the private realm through structural differentiation. However, FBOs demonstrate the opposite: religion survives and actively responds to public needs through health services, education, and humanitarian assistance. In Zimbabwe, for example, FBOs take over state functions that fail to provide basic services, while still maintaining the mission of evangelisation (Musekiwa & Musekiwa, 2023). This phenomenon reinforces Berger's (1996) criticism that the assumption of a "secularised" world is erroneous. Religion has not disappeared; instead, it has adapted to the logic of modernity, even becoming a key actor in addressing the gaps in state failure.

In recent studies, there are two main trends regarding the way FBOs interact with the state, namely first, as entities that contest with the state on policy issues that are contrary to their religious values (Hounmenou, 2023; Musekiwa & Musekiwa, 2023; Occhipinti, 2015; Sakai, 2012), second, as a strategic partner that collaborates with the state in providing social services for the community (Kegler et al., 2010; Lotta et al., 2024; Partnership with Faith-Based Organizations - UNAIDS Strategic Framework, t.t.). However, neither approach has fully captured the complexity of the reality on the ground. FBOs not only act as actors who contest or collaborate with the state, but also as mediators (*brokers)* between religious values and the principles of secularism in public policy. As *brokers*, they bridge the interests of religious communities with governments. At the same time, as *translators*, they translate religious values into policies that are more inclusive and acceptable in the broader public sphere. (Bolotta et al., 2019a)

This article questions FBOs in their role as an opposition or partner of the state. Does this role depend on a country's political, legal, or economic context? Should studies of FBOs move from a dichotomous model to a **hybrid perspective**, where FBOs can be an opposition in one policy but a partner in another? (Stapleton, 2024). In this case, are the concepts of "brokerage" and "translation" by FBOs efficient in creating more inclusive policies, or are they just a tool of legitimacy for a particular religious agenda? Therefore, this study argues that understanding FBOs can no longer be done with a rigid approach. Instead, a more dynamic perspective is needed that sees FBOs as hybrid actors capable of managing the relationship between sacred values and secular policies.

2. Literature Review

The dynamics of FBOs' contestation with the state reveal the complex battle of modernity over authority, resources, and public space. In assertive secular countries like France and Turkey, FBOs have emerged as active opposition against restrictions on religious expression. For example, Islamic organizations' resistance to the hijab ban reflects the tension between the principle of laïcité and religious rights (Kuru, 2007). Meanwhile, in authoritarian contexts such as Zimbabwe or Indonesia during the New Order era, FBOs have become "passive opposition" by assuming the functions of the collapsed state in health and education services (Musekiwa, 2023), despite facing stigmatization as a political threat (Fauzia, 2013). Contestation reaches a tipping point when FBOs become involved in geopolitical instrumentalizations, such as Western-funded religious-based deradicalization programs (Rabasa et al., 2010), which risk eroding their legitimacy at the grassroots level.

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Collaborations between FBOs and countries are evolving across a spectrum of models: from complementary relationships (Catholic Relief Services filling the gap in health services in rural Africa), to integrative partnerships (Muhammadiyah/NU's formal association with the Indonesian government in the PKH program), and adversarial-collaborative dynamics (Pastoral da Criança in Brazil criticizing policies while participating). The effectiveness of these partnerships hinges on the FBOs' ability to navigate dual accountability—meeting state standards as funders while maintaining the trust of the community base. Tensions arise when theological values clash with the state's agenda, such as the rejection of Catholic FBOs in the Philippines against the distribution of contraceptives (Lau et al., 2020), or the tendency to serve same-faith groups that fuels fragmentation (Sakai, 2012). While the holistic approach of FBOs (combining material-spiritual assistance) represents a unique strength, the risk of minority co-optation and exclusion remains a structural challenge.

As brokers, FBOs bridge the sacred-secular logic through three key roles: neutral mediators (honest brokers), advocates of religious values (pressure brokers such as Mercy House's rejection of donor demands), and agents of transformation (broker advocates such as Zidny in Egypt who converted zakat into productivity instruments). In parallel, translation practice involves semantic adjustment through reframing (NU shifts the narrative of "many children have a lot of sustenance" to family-based family planning sakinah), filtering (selection of religious values compatible with secular policies), and hybridization (the creation of discourses such as Islamic environmentalism). This process creates a "liminal space" (Wedel, 2009) where values are negotiated, even though they are vulnerable to the reduction of religion to technical tools (over-translation) or the co-optation of neoliberal logic—as criticized in the case of "pious neoliberalism" in Egypt (Atia, 2013).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a comprehensive literature study design and critical discourse analysis. The research population comprises multidisciplinary academic documents (sociology of religion, public policy, development studies) published between 1996 and 2024, including reputable international journals, monographs, and policy reports concerning the role of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) globally. The sample was selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) relevance to religion-country dynamics, (2) balanced geographical representation (Global North/South), and (3) availability of empirical data on brokerage and translation practices. The data collection technique utilized a systematic search of the Scopus database, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, employing controlled keywords such as “faith-based organizations AND state relations,” “religious brokerage AND public policy,” and “secularization theory AND hybridity,” supplemented by snowball sampling from key document citations.

Data analysis was conducted in stages: first, content analysis to identify the pattern of FBOs-state interaction (contestation/collaboration); second, Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to unravel the practice of semantic adjustment in the translation of religious values; third, comparative case studies (Muhammadiyah/Indonesia, Caritas/Europe, Zidny/Egypt) serving as a unit of analysis to test the concept of liminal space. The validity of the data is upheld through triangulation of sources (policy documents, FBOs reports, expert interviews) and peer debriefing with religious studies academics. The interpretive technique employs a hermeneutical circle model to relate empirical findings to Habermas's post-secular theoretical framework and boundary spanning theory.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. FBOs Contest with the State

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) play a crucial role in shaping and implementing social policies across various global contexts. They often serve as intermediaries between states and communities, providing social services and influencing policy through their unique societal positions. In countries like Turkey, FBOs engage in social assistance programs that can sometimes

function as a tool of political patronage. They help consolidate government power by administering social assistance, a strategy that may influence voter behavior among people experiencing poverty (Arslan Köse, 2019). Similarly, FBOs in Sweden complement the public welfare system, addressing gaps in social protection and tackling poverty and social exclusion. They deliver essential services in areas not covered by the government (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2012). However, the relationship between FBOs and the state is not always harmonious; this interaction is often marked by contestation, collaboration, and complex negotiations, depending on local politics, law, and cultural dynamics.

FBOs in Jordan and Lebanon serve as intermediaries between international donors and local communities, particularly in providing aid for Syrian refugees. They navigate a complex socio-political landscape characterized by issues of accountability and the capacity of countries with refugee crises that require FBOs as partners (Kraft & Smith, 2019). However, local regulations and political pressures restrict their ability to operate freely. Similarly, in Indonesia, during the political dynamics of the New Order, the state perceives the activities of FBOs as a potential threat and thus imposes regulations on the funding of religious organizations, particularly Islamic ones, complicating effective partnerships due to theological differences among religious groups (Sakai, 2012). Continuing into the reform era, Muhammadiyah, the leading Islamic FBO in Indonesia, has shown capability in humanitarian diplomacy by negotiating access, advocacy, and program supervision. It has emerged as a model for other FBOs facing global challenges to counter and complement the country's policies (Husein et al., 2024).

The above facts illustrate that FBOs play a critical role as a form of "constructive opposition" that fills the void of state services while simultaneously facing multidimensional pressures from regulatory, economic, and political factors. Therefore, this role is not universal but heavily depends on a country's political, legal, and economic context. In political and economic contexts, FBOs operate across a varied spectrum. In countries with high authoritarianism, such as Zimbabwe, where the state has failed to perform basic functions, FBOs become "passive opposition" by taking over health services and education—a subtle form of resistance to state incompetence. Meanwhile, during a period of centralistic political power in Indonesia, albeit with religious pluralism, FBOs faced tight control through stigmatization as a "threat," forcing them to negotiate with the state to maintain their space of movement Bidang (Fauzia, 2017).

It further explains that countries with assertive secularism (e.g., France and Turkey) actively restrict religious expression in public spaces (Kuru, 2007). In this regard, FBOs are often positioned as "opposition" to state policies that limit the role of religion. In France, for example, the ban on religious symbols in schools or public institutions (such as the hijab) sparked resistance from Islamic FBOs advocating for religious rights (Finke, 2010). Similarly, in Turkey, restrictions on Islamic FBOs by secular-Kemalist states have led to contestation, much like the Gülen Movement experienced before the 2016 conflict (Finke, 2010). In this context, FBOs employ strategies such as litigation, public campaigns, or the establishment of alternative networks to counter marginalization. They emerged as an opposition that fought for religious space in social policy while simultaneously facing the risk of stigmatization as a "threat to secularity."

In countries with passive secularism like the United States, faith-based organizations (FBOs) enjoy greater freedom to engage in social policy, although there remains ongoing debate over participation limits. In the United States, conservative Christian FBOs often find themselves in conflict with the government regarding funding for reproductive health programs that clash with their religious values. Conversely, organizations such as Catholic Charities collaborate with the government on migrant services, illustrating a mix of opposition and cooperation (Finke, 2010). In

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this context, contestation becomes negotiable—FBOs utilize legal loopholes to shape policy without confrontation, while still maintaining their religious identity.

On the other hand, FBOs can be caught in a contest between maintaining autonomy and becoming a state tool, which is certainly a dilemma for the FBOs themselves. (Parenkov & Vorotnikov, 2023), where the “instrumentalization of religion” in Western foreign policy (e.g., religion-based deradicalization programs) creates a dilemma for FBOs. FBOs that receive state funding for deradicalization programs risk losing legitimacy in the eyes of the community, as they are considered the “long arm of the state”. One controversial RAND Corporation report is "Building Moderate Muslim Networks” (2007). The report recommends that the U.S. build a global network of moderate Muslims through FBOs, educational institutions, and the media. Using FBOs as a tool to promote the values of “democracy" and “pluralism" aligned with U.S. interests (Rabasa dkk., 2010).

Thus, FBOs serve as a “constructive opposition” that fills the gap left by state services while navigating the religious space in public policy. However, this role is closely tied to political, legal, and economic complexities. The most significant challenges arise when FBOs become entangled in the instrumentalization of religion by geopolitical interests, such as the RAND Corporation’s recommendation, which reduces the role of FBOs to a mere tool for promoting Western-style “democracy,” ultimately undermining their legitimacy within the community. Therefore, FBOs are not just alternatives to the state; they are dynamic entities that embody the tension between religious autonomy, state pressure, and societal needs—a phenomenon that illustrates how the contestation between religion and state in social policy reflects the struggle for authority, resources, and narratives amid pluralistic modernity

4.2. Collaboration of FBOs with Countries

Partnerships between faith-based organizations (FBOs) and the state regarding social, health, and welfare policies should not be viewed as monolithic relationships but as multidimensional phenomena shaped by political, theological, and sociostructural dynamics. Conceptually, these partnerships can be categorized into four main models: complementary, supplementary, adversarial-collaborative, and integrative (Derrick-Mills, 2015). The complementary model, for instance, is grounded in the principle of subsidiarity as articulated in the theory of Welfare Pluralism (Johnson, 1987), where FBOs serve as providers in areas the state cannot access (Derrick-Mills, 2015). For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, organizations such as Catholic Relief Services address the gap in health infrastructure by constructing clinics in rural regions, while governments concentrate on macro poli (Olivier & Wodon, 2012). Government initiatives, like the Faith and Community-Based Initiatives in the U.S., have encouraged FBOs to engage in social services, showcasing the variability. Regarding these partnerships structured and funded. (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). This model confirms that the state and FBOs are complementary in the welfare ecosystem, not competing entities.

However, partnerships are not always harmonious. The adversarial-collaborative model refers to a collaboration between different interests that chooset interests that choose to collaborate for mutual benefit. In the context of FBOs, they can play a dual role, serving as partners and as policy critics. Liberation theology in Latin America, for example, encourages FBOs like Pastoral da Criança in Brazil to advocate for the rights of the poor while collaborating with government programs. This phenomenon aligns with the Advocacy Coalition Framework, which emphasizes that non-state actors can form coalitions to influence policy(Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994). In this context, FBOs become the “long arm” of the state and serve as a balance of power through religious values-based mobilization.

Meanwhile, the integrative model reflects a formally institutionalized partnership. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Social Affairs collaborates with Muhammadiyah and NU on social assistance programs such as PKH (Family Hope Program). FBOs identify beneficiaries and ensure targeted distribution (World Bank, 2018). According to Network Governance theory, this type of collaboration requires a clear division of roles and a multidirectional accountability mechanism (Pu & Zou, 2025). However, this model is also susceptible to criticism, such as the risk of religious instrumentalization, where governments use FBOs to achieve policy targets without considering the organization's theological mandate. (Clarke, 2006).

In the sectoral dimension, the integration of religious values into public policy is established. In the health sector, for example, FBOs not only provide medical services but also leverage their religious moral authority to change people's behavior. The WHO (2019) notes that HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns by FBOs in Malawi are more effective because they combine health messages with religious narratives, such as the use of the concept of "body stewardship" in Christianity and "amar ma'ruf nahi munkar" in Islam. This approach aligns with the Health Belief (Junaidah & Bakti, 2022), which emphasizes that risk perception and cultural beliefs are key determinants of behavior change. In Indonesia, the Nahdlatul Ulama Health Institute (LKNU) uses religious lectures to promote vaccination (Subekti, 2022), demonstrating how religion can serve as a bridge between public policy and community participation.

In social welfare, FBOs adopt a holistic approach that integrates material assistance with spiritual support. Islamic Relief Worldwide, for example, distributes zakat and organizes entrepreneurship training for women in Yemen, thus creating a long-term impact (Jahani & Parayandeh, 2024). The strength of FBOs is their ability to build trust through established religious networks while overcoming poverty-related stigma with religious narratives such as "service to others as worship" (Kaur, 2019). However, this advantage certainly comes with the risk of overly religion-specific services potentially ignoring minority groups, as is the case in Nigeria where Christian FBOs dominante in Muslim areas (Uzochukwu dkk., 2021).

Although partnerships between FBOs and states are promising, their complexities should not be overlooked. First, accountability is often a critical issue. FBOs face dual demands: meeting government standards as funders (vertical accountability) while maintaining the trust of their base community (horizontal accountability). In the Philippines, for instance, conflict arose when Catholic FBOs refused to distribute contraceptives that contradicted church doctrine, even though this was a condition of the government's health program Bidang (Lotta dkk., 2024). Second, service fragmentation can occur if FBOs primarily serve religious groups, as seen with the Amil Zakat Institute (LAZ) in Indonesia, which focuses more on Muslims than non-Muslims (Sakai, 2012).

To address these challenges, reconfiguring partnerships based on the "inclusive justice" principle is essential. Governments should adopt regulatory frameworks that protect the rights of minority groups, such as the Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom (Mason & Minerva, 2022), which can then serve as a reference to require FBOs to ensure their services are non-discriminatory. Conversely, FBOs must enhance their managerial capacity through evidence-based training, as PEPFAR has done in its AIDS prevention program in Africa (PEPFAR, 2023) (Kaur, 2019). Furthermore, community-based participatory research can bridge religious values with policy needs, for instance, by involving religious leaders in designing stunting control programs.

Therefore, overall, from the above description, there is a need for transformative synergy. The partnership between FBOs and the state is not merely a technical collaboration; it also creates a space to negotiate the values of the state's secular logic alongside religious moral authority. To achieve transformational synergy, both parties must acknowledge that the success of social policies is assessed not only through material outputs but also through the strengthening of social cohesion

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and distributive justice rooted in the universal values of religion. In other words, this partnership must transition from a service delivery paradigm to social justice advocacy, where FBOs act as partners and guardians of public policy ethics.

4.3. FBOs as Brokerages and Translators

4.3.1. Brokerage as mediation in the arena of Religious-State contestation

Brokerage in the context of FBOs refers to the role of actors who bridge interests between religious groups (with particular values) and secular actors (states, international donors, or development agencies) (Bolotta dkk., 2019). The concept positions FBOs as boundary spanners that connect the sacred logic of religion with the secular rationality of the state. In a pluralist democratic system, FBOs function not only as channels of communication but also as actors who convert cultural capital (understanding of religious symbols), networks (access to communities and elites), and legitimacy (spiritual authority) into political bargaining power (Sider & Unruh, 2004).

As articulated by Julia Berger, the typological approach in the study of FBOs often categorizes religious organizations separately from secular NGOs based on operational criteria such as "education" or "disaster relief." However, this article critiques such reductionism as a product of Western epistemological bias that perpetuates the religious-secular dichotomy and the legacy of the modernity project. For instance, Berger overlooks the dynamics of religious-secular value hybridization that occur in the daily practices of FBOs. Zidny in Egypt Bidang (Atia, 2013), illustrates how this organization combines the principle of zakat (religious obligation) with neoliberal management training, blurring the line between religious charity and market logic. A similar critique was offered by Tomalin, who argued that this typological framework fails to explain the contexts in which religion is integrated with social life, as seen in Uganda or India, rendering the category of “religion-based” artificial. This discourse reflects the tension between policy instrumentalism (which advocates for practical classification) and anthropological criticism (which highlights cultural complexity). Therefore, ethnographic studies reveal that FBOs do not merely “implement” donor programs; they actively reshape religious and secular meanings through daily practice, as demonstrated by the Mercy House nuns, who rejected audit demands to preserve the unconditional “charism” of ministry Bidang (Scherz, 2014). Thus, the typology is not only inadequate but also potentially obscures the role of FBOs as transformative actors.

The concept of brokerage offers an alternative lens to understand FBOs as a bridge connecting the logic of religion and development (Pu & Zou, 2025). This theory is rooted in an interactionist perspective that views development as a contest arena, where brokers act as boundary spanners (Ratinen, 2019). Furthermore, this paper aims to expand the concept of brokerage by identifying three types: namely, honest brokers (neutral, mediator), pressure brokers (advocacy of religious values), and advocate brokers (value transformation). For example, Muhammadiyah in Indonesia plays the role of an advocate broker by translating the ulema's fatwa on family planning into a reproductive health program that aligns with state policies (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994). Similarly, Mercy House in Uganda acts as a pressure broker by rejecting the compromise of religious values for the sake of donor demands, while Zidny in Egypt becomes an advocate broker who transforms zakat into an instrument of economic productivity (Harries, 2019). The debate arose when this theory faced criticism concerning religious neoliberalization. However, criticism emerges from the perspective of systems theory regarding religion and the state as “autopoietic” systems that should not interact without "radical translation,” (Niklas Luhmann - Social Systems (Writing Science) -Stanford University Press (1996), t.t.), leading to the perception of FBOs as a functionalist illusion. On the other hand, the ethnographic study by Wedel et al. (2009) refutes this by demonstrating

that FBOs create a “liminal space” in which sacred and secular values are negotiated—as seen in the case of Caritas Internationalis in Europe, which failed to reconcile the doctrine of “preferential option for the poor” with anti-migrant nationalism (Atia, 2013).

4.3.2.Translation as a mechanism of symbolic adaptation and conflict of meaning

Translation theory analyzes how FBOs make semantic adjustments—adapting religious values into the language of secular policy without losing their transcendental essence. This process is not a passive adaptation but a symbolic exchange involving conflict and compromise. For example, Amr Khaled in Egypt translates management skills as “Islamic values” creating a narrative of “pious neoliberalism” that reconfigures religious-economic boundaries (Atia, 2013), on the other hand, posits that the translation process by FBOs is not just a linguistic adaptation but a semantic adjustment that involves three mechanisms: Reframing (changing religious narratives into policy language, such as zakat as a “social tax”), Filtering (filtering religious values that are compatible with secular law), and Hybridization (creating hybrid concepts such as Islamic environmentalism).

However, this process presents a dilemma: maintaining authenticity (fidelity to religious texts) without sacrificing relevance (relevance to policy). The concept of “family sakinah” (harmonious family), promoted by Muslimat NU activists Bidang (Hidayat & Soiman, 2016), is a perfect example of semantic adjustment. This term originates from Islamic terminology (Q.S. Ar-Rum: 21) and emphasizes calmness, compassion, and responsibility within the family. However, in the context of the Family Planning (KB) program, this concept translates into a policy framework that advocates for gender equality, maternal health, and family planning. This process involves reframing—that is, shifting the focus from eschatological doctrine (e.g., many children have plenty of sustenance) to emphasizing family welfare through contraception. Next, filtering refers to selecting fiqh interpretations that support family planning, such as consulting ulama fatwa that permit contraception for health reasons. Finally, hybridization entails creating a hybrid narrative like “Islamic Family Planning,” which blends religious principles with secular demographic data.

NU Muslimat translates the concept of the "sakinah family" to promote contraception as a practical strategy; however, it has faced internal criticism for being seen as diminishing Islamic eschatology (Koehrsen, 2021). Conservative critics often argue that it “sacrifices religious principles” in favor of conforming to a global agenda (e.g., the interpretation of the democratic system in Islam) (Yudha Pedyanto, 2014). In fact, Clarke & Jennings have cautioned against the risks of over-translation, where the transcendental aspects of religion are reduced to mere technical instruments (Clarke & Jennings, 2008). In this context, critical discourse analysis can reveal how religious narratives are reconstructed by faith-based organizations (FBOs). For instance, Amr Khaled in Egypt, who framed modern management as "Islamic values," (Atia, 2013) generated a discourse of "pious neoliberalism" that obscures the distinction between religious ethics and market logic, representing a form of hybridization that has been criticized as neoliberal co-optation.

Therefore, the role of FBOs cannot be separated from the context of religious-state relations. France, with its strict principle of laïcité, limits the room for FBOs to operate in public policy, such as the rejection of religious-based social assistance programs (Everett, 2018). In contrast, in India, FBOs such as the RSS have managed to influence education policy through the narrative of "Hindu culture," utilizing community networks and legitimacy as “custodians of tradition” (Roy et al., 2020). This difference suggests that the effectiveness of FBOs as brokers is highly dependent on local political structures. Principal-Agent Theory can explain this dynamic, where FBOs often become government “agents" to reach out to religious

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communities. However, this relationship is prone to conflict when interests clash, as seen in the case of conservative Islamic NGOs in Indonesia that rejected LGBTQ+ inclusion policies despite being state-funded (Kosim et al., 2023).

Habermas's perspective is one of the offers to consider, specifically a post-secular viewpoint that acknowledges the public role of religion without compromising modern rationality (Dew, 2019).In this framework, FBOs are viewed as actors who reshape the religious private-public dichotomy, illustrated by NU's advocacy for pesantren-based environmental justice. However, neoliberal critics regard FBOs as part of "NGO-ization," i.e., the process through which religious movements are commodified into technocratic projects subject to donor logic (Williams et al., 2012). For example, Caritas Internationalis in Europe has faced criticism for accepting EU funding for migrant programs but ignores the structural root of poverty (Clemens & Postel, 2018). Here, the theory of the policy arena assists in analyzing how FBOs navigate the "liminal space" between religion and the state, while simultaneously confronting the risk of losing autonomy.

5. Conclusion

As a researcher, the theoretical position taken in this study is to reject dichotomous reductionism that separates the role of FBOs as either opposition or state partner. Through a multidimensional analysis, this study strengthens the argument that FBOs are hybrid actors operating in a liminal space between religion and secularism. The concepts of brokerage and translation are key to understanding how FBOs bridge sacred values with the logic of public policy while simultaneously converting cultural-religious capital into political bargaining power. Empirical examples, such as Muhammadiyah in Indonesia, which translated religious fatwas into reproductive health programs, demonstrate that this symbolic adaptation is pragmatic and transformative.

However, a significant theoretical gap exists in the tendency of previous studies to overlook the complexity of "value hybridization" in the practices of FBOs. Classical secularization theories fail to explain the ability of religion to integrate with modernity through semantic adjustment mechanisms. At the same time, functional approaches often neglect the conflict of meaning and the risk of "religious instrumentalization." Additionally, the study of FBOs remains fragmented by Western epistemological biases that uphold a religious-secular dichotomy, thereby obscuring local dynamics such as the role of Islamic boarding school networks in environmental advocacy or the resistance of FBOs to donor pressure.

This research confirms the need for a more inclusive theoretical framework, such as Habermas's "post-secular" perspective that recognizes religion as a public actor without sacrificing criticism of neoliberal co-optation. Therefore, future studies should focus on micro-interactions between FBO agencies, political structures, and cultural contexts to uncover how transcendental values are maintained or compromised during the process of policy translation.

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