

# VIOLENCE AGAINST AHMADIYYA AS PRODUCTIVE INTOLERANCE: ADDRESSING JEREMY MENCHIK'S GODLY NATIONALISM



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## Abstract

This article examines godly nationalism using the theory of secularism. This connection is based on a shared "we-feeling" rooted in the common belief systems fostered by cooperation between the state and religious organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis). Jeremy Menchik argues that violence against Ahmadiyya should be viewed as "productive intolerance" rather than merely damaging democracy, as it is intended to protect this religious bond. The concept of godly nationalism has been criticized for neglecting religious freedom as a human right. This concept also overemphasizes macro-level data while failing to explain the local realities experienced by Ahmadiyya. The primary data for this research is Menchik's book titled "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism," then, it will be analyzed theoretically by borrowing Jose Casanova's secularism theory. This article found that the absence of secularism discourse throughout his work influenced his stance in understanding the nuances of religious intolerance in Indonesia. According to Menchik, Indonesia is viewed as a moderate country, but not in the form of binary opposition, as seen in the genealogy of secularism in the Western world, where religion is often positioned with certain negative prepositions.

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji nasionalisme bertuhan dengan menggunakan teori sekularisme. Menchik mengartikan hubungan agama dan negara di Indonesia yang menjalin keterkaitan sebagai "nasionalisme bertuhan". Keterkaitan ini berdasarkan "perasaan kebersamaan" yang bersumber pada sistem kepercayaan bersama yang dibina melalui kerja sama antara negara dan organisasi keagamaan (NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis). Jeremy Menchik berpendapat bahwa kekerasan terhadap Ahmadiyah harus dilihat sebagai "intoleransi produktif" dan bukan sekedar merusak demokrasi, karena hal ini dimaksudkan untuk melindungi ikatan keagamaan. Konsep nasionalisme bertuhan telah dikritik karena mengabaikan kebebasan beragama sebagai hak asasi manusia. Konsep ini juga terlalu menekankan data makro dan gagal menjelaskan realitas lokal yang dialami Ahmadiyah. Data primer penelitian ini adalah buku Menchik yang berjudul "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism", selanjutnya akan dianalisis secara teoritis dengan meminjam teori sekularisme Jose Casanova. Temuan artikel ini menunjukkan ketiadaan wacana sekularisme di sepanjang karyanya mempengaruhi pendiriannya dalam memahami nuansa intoleransi beragama di Indonesia. Menurut Menchik, Indonesia dipandang sebagai negara yang moderat, namun tidak dalam bentuk oposisi biner, seperti terlihat pada genealogi sekularisme di dunia Barat, di mana agama seringkali diposisikan dengan preposisi negatif tertentu.

## INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, the trend of violence against religious minority groups increased in Indonesia. Religious-based violence not only targeted groups of different faiths but also extended to heterodox Islamic groups like



Ahmadiyya. Ahmadiyya faced violence from small but vocal Islamic groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). Scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon of violence against heterodox religious groups in Indonesia from various perspectives. One recent analysis is presented by Jeremy Menchik in his writing titled "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism." Menchik offers a significantly different approach to understanding violence against Ahmadiyya. Instead of viewing intolerance and violence as damaging to democracy and solidarity, Menchik argues that violence against Ahmadiyya can be seen as a form of productive intolerance as it aligns with Indonesia's ideology of godly nationalism. Based on this premise, this essay aims to describe the concept of godly nationalism and its implications for understanding religious violence against Ahmadiyya.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world that implements a liberal democracy system. Nevertheless, the current religious situation where minority religious groups such as Ahmadiyya endure persecution raises questions about Indonesia's commitment to democracy (Andi Muh. Taqiyuddin Bn et al., 2022; Regus, 2019). Many researchers attempt to interpret the violence against Ahmadiyya from various perspectives. According to Rizkita & Hidayat (2023), violence against Ahmadiyya is a form of hate crime, a violent act fueled by hatred towards the victim's identity. This violence is often carried out in the name of righteousness, such as defending religion (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001). Burhani (2021) found that perpetrators of violence against Ahmadiyya believe that attacking Ahmadiyya is a form of "virtue" because it prevents Ahmadiyya's deviant beliefs from spreading to society. To withstand various sorts of violence, Ahmadiyya's strategy tends to be defensive and non-confrontational. Through various international forums, Ahmadiyya's leader, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, delivers speeches on world peace, such as the adverse effects of nuclear weapons use, global unity, and so forth (M. M. Ahmad, 2013).

Ahmadiyya was founded in Qadian, Punjab, India, in 1888 through the ideas of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Since its founding, Ahmadiyya has been a controversial religious movement, even in its country of origin. The Ahmadiyya group is believed to have been present in Indonesia since 1925, and it later split into two distinct factions: Ahmadiyya Lahore and Ahmadiyya Qadian. The most notable difference between these two factions is their views regarding Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Ahmadiyya Qadian regards Mirza as a non-law-bearing prophet (*Zilli Ghayr al-Tasyri'*) (Zulkarnain, 2005, p. 65), while Ahmadiyya Lahore believes that Mirza is merely a reformer of Islam (*mujaddid*) and not a prophet. Besides their views on the prophethood of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Ahmadiyya also holds unconventional beliefs about the death of Prophet Isa (Jesus). According to their beliefs, Isa did not ascend to heaven but died naturally. These two issues have led to considerable opposition to Ahmadiyya in various Islamic countries, including Indonesia, where the group is viewed as deviating from the Sunni Islamic orthodoxy followed by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia (Iqbal, 2014). Such rejection has often resulted in violence, including acts of murder (Maharani, 2020), bans on religious activities, and the destruction of places of worship (Tim CNN Indonesia, 2021).

According to the International Religious Freedom (IRF) report, in 2020, at least eight illegal acts of violence against Ahmadiyya occurred. Along with the IRF report, the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) reported similar findings. The trend of violence against Ahmadiyya has been on the rise since 2008, following a joint ministerial decree (SKB tiga menteri) issued by the Ministry of Religion, Attorney

General, and Minister of Home Affairs, which contained warnings against Ahmadiyya, especially the Qadiani branch, to stop spreading interpretations and activities considered deviating from Islamic teachings, namely the belief in prophets after Prophet Muhammad (Mariani, 2013; Rizkita & Hidayat, 2023). The increasing incidents of intolerance towards the Ahmadiyya community have raised concerns about whether Indonesia is becoming less tolerant of religious differences.

In reality, diversity and tolerance have been prerequisites for the emergence of the Indonesian nation. Major religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and other belief systems, have coexisted. Even as a later arrival, Islam spread peacefully, incorporating elements from Hindu – Buddhist culture; it has become a shared awareness that Islam in Indonesia was diffused by the "Wali Songo" that employed a cultural approach by integrating Islamic teachings into various forms of artistic performances such as wayang (*shadow puppetry*) and gamelan (*traditional musical ensemble*) (Kato, 2021). After becoming the majority religion, Indonesian Islam was known for its pluralistic nature and tolerant character. It was evident, for example, in the dynamics of formulating Pancasila, where Islam willingly removed the clause "with the obligation to implement Islamic law for its adherents" and replaced the term "muqaddimah" with "pembukaan" (opening) in the Jakarta Charter.

As stated by Menchik in his book "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia," the tolerant nature of Indonesian Muslims was significantly shaped by three of the country's largest religious organizations: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Persis (Menchik, 2014a, p. 4). These three organizations were considered the most vocal advocates of religious tolerance. However, Menchik found their stance toward Ahmadiyya to be ambivalent. Rather than condemning violence against Ahmadiyya, these organizations tended to remain silent and even reached a consensus in rejecting the presence of Ahmadiyya in Indonesia (Menchik, 2016, p. 66). Menchik argues that there is a boundary between religious tolerance and religious liberalism. Unfortunately, Ahmadiyya seems to fall outside the threshold of religious tolerance as perceived by Islam in Indonesia.

The ambivalence demonstrated by these religious organizations troubles Menchik. The explanation that violence against Ahmadiyya constitutes a democratic failure, in his opinion, is entirely unsatisfactory. Instead, Menchik takes a radical turn in his analysis. Rather than viewing intolerance towards Ahmadiyya as a damaging and divisive action, he contends that such intolerance actually fosters a sense of "we – feeling" or unity, eventually leading to the formation of Indonesian nationalism. He calls this phenomenon "godly nationalism." Menchik posits that godly nationalism emerges from the specific practice of excluding minority groups. These minority groups are labeled as a "common enemy," which strengthens the sense of unity. According to Menchik, this phenomenon can be observed in many multi – religious countries like Indonesia.

Menchik points out that the genealogy of godly nationalism has existed since pre – independence times. His historical analysis from the 1920s convincingly demonstrates that violence against Ahmadiyya did not arise solely as a result of the strengthening of democracy after the fall of the Soeharto regime. According to Menchik, even before Indonesia's independence, violence against Ahmadiyya involving religious organizations had already occurred. As Indonesia gained independence, godly nationalism became more apparent through the institutionalization of the state. Its pinnacle was reached when President Sukarno issued Presidential Regulation No. 1 of

1965 concerning the Prevention of Misuse or Defamation of Religion. This regulation represents the religious orthodoxy imposed by the state. Menchik argues that through this regulation, the state privileged one religion or religious faction over others, a manifestation of Indonesia's nationalism based on godly nationalism.

Menchik defines godly nationalism as "an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society." With such a definition, any form of violence against minority groups like Ahmadiyya should be understood as the state's effort to strengthen godly nationalism. As Menchik stated, "For a godly nationalism to endure, it must privilege some beliefs and prosecute acts of deviance as blasphemy." Several academics have responded to Menchik's writing. The book "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia" presents a wealth of data and applauds Menchik's boldness in interpreting Indonesia's religious situation through the lens of local religion (Atalay, 2018; Chaplin, 2017; Hamayotsu, 2014). Menchik's concept of godly nationalism has also been used by some Indonesian academics for the state's strategy in fostering religious tolerance (see Sopyan dkk., 2021; Suryana, 2018).

However, Menchik's concept of godly nationalism has also received much criticism. Allen & Allen (2016) note that Menchik's writing explains Indonesia's religious and political situation but fails to describe their interrelation. Meanwhile, Liddle (2014) accuses the implications of Menchik's godly nationalism concept, which refers to violence against Ahmadiyya as productive intolerance, of neglecting religious freedom as a human right. According to Liddle, the presidential decree of 1965, mentioned by Menchik as the institutionalization of godly nationalism, should be seen as a failure of the legal system in Indonesia. Taking a new approach to understanding violence against minority groups in Indonesia is commendable. Meanwhile, the final and quite severe criticism is presented by Ahmad Hamdi. According to him, Menchik's concept of godly nationalism has failed to describe the situation experienced by Ahmadiyya in Indonesia; Hamdi believes that Menchik is too focused on macro-level data without considering micro-level data on violence cases. This essay attempts to take a different approach to understanding Menchik's concept of godly nationalism (Hamdi & Wahid, 2017).

In building his idea of godly nationalism, Menchik uses Benedict Anderson's imagined community framework without seriously incorporating secularism discourse. This essay shows that the lack of discussion on secularism in Menchik's book makes Menchik hastily juxtapose secular states with theocracy, thus affecting Menchik's view of cases of intolerance towards the Ahmadiyya. The primary data for this research is Menchik's book titled "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism," then, it will be analyzed theoretically by borrowing Jose Casanova's secularism theory.

## **ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA: TOLERANCE WITHOUT LIBERALISM**

With an approximate population of 260 million, of whom 87% adhere to the Islamic faith, Indonesia stands as the most populous Muslim-majority nation globally and the third-largest democracy. Ongoing debates among analysts persist regarding whether Indonesia serves as a successful model of democratic transition within a Muslim-majority context (Gismar, 2021; Hefner, 2019). Despite prevailing skepticism, as asserted by Azumardi Azra (2014), Indonesian democracy has demonstrated its

efficacy through general elections. A mounting number of incidents of intolerance within Indonesia prompts this inquiry. Heightened apprehensions regarding democracy in Indonesia stem from the state's perceived failure to safeguard minority groups (Harsono, 2012). Various factors contribute to this state of affairs, encompassing economic dynamics (Subchi et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2019), the burgeoning influence of Islamic conservatism (Pribadi, 2021), and Islamic populism (Netanyahu & Susanto, 2022). Conversely, Gismar (2021) posits that intolerance arises from the state's shortcomings in managing religious affairs. Collectively, the studies mentioned earlier underscore the multifaceted nature of intolerance. Meanwhile, Menchik endeavors to elucidate intolerance as a manifestation of an ideology embraced within Indonesia.

The book "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism" (2014) was derived from Menchik's doctoral dissertation at Boston University. The dissertation was eventually transformed into a book and published by Cambridge University Press, due to encouragement from his university. The book presents an empirical–theoretical analysis of the interpretation of Islamic tolerance in Indonesia and the attitudes of religious organizations in Indonesia toward minority religious groups. Focusing on the three prominent Islamic organizations, namely Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Persis, it becomes apparent that while these organizations are considered tolerant, they have been involved in various acts of rejection toward minority groups such as heterodox Islamic groups like Shia and Ahmadiyya. (Menchik, 2016, p. 4)

Such contradictions must be addressed further, as Menchik believes that the positions of these three Islamic organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis) are critical to Indonesia's democratization, going so far as to say that these organizations are "a key reason why Indonesia is a democratic overachiever." (Menchik, 2016, p. 15).

To gain a deeper understanding of the above contradictory trends, a comprehensive examination of the tolerance of these three religious organizations is required. Within this context, the book has two main objectives: 1) to explain how NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis interpret tolerance as the fundamental values of their politics, and 2) to try to explain how these interpretations are formed. The book consists of seven chapters, including one introductory chapter. The chapters are as follows (Menchik, 2016, pp. 16–17):

1. After Secularization: This chapter serves as an introduction, providing the urgency for Jeremy Menchik's writing and the strategy to achieve his writing goals.
2. Explaining Tolerance and Intolerance: This chapter contains theoretical discussions that serve as the basis for understanding how religious organizations such as NU, Persis, and Muhammadiyah build their understanding of tolerance, which Menchik believes arises from social interactions rather than theological understanding.
3. Local Genealogies: This chapter presents empirical surveys conducted by Jeremy Menchik, demonstrating that the attitudes of Islamic organizations towards minority groups are dynamic. Menchik sees this as an effort to navigate and respond to threats from missionary movements of other religions toward Islam.
4. Godly Nationalism: In this chapter, Menchik tries to capture an interesting phenomenon – religious organizations that are tolerant but intolerant toward certain religious groups like Ahmadiyya. According to Menchik, such attitudes



are the result of a consensus between the state and religious organizations since the 1930s, which excluded Ahmadiyya from the definition of Indonesian Islam.

5. **The Coevolution of Religion and State:** This chapter contains a historical analysis that shows the dynamics of tolerance between religion and the state, which are interrelated. Menchik illustrates this through the involvement of Masyumi and Persis in the 1965 legislative election, the dynamics of Hindu recognition as the official religion from 1953 to 1964, and the harmonious then contentious relationship between NU and the Communist Party.
6. **Religion and Democracy:** This chapter provides conclusions and reflections on the previous chapters.

Democracy in Indonesia, while not perfect, has been thriving. As a democratic country with a Muslim majority, the question arises whether Indonesia has been able to accommodate the rights of diverse religious communities, especially minority groups. Are individual and communal rights of minority religious groups provided and guaranteed by the state as described in the liberal democratic model? How are various religious views, values, and practices involved in formulating public policies? The questions about the compatibility of Islam and democracy in Indonesia become more critical to review with the emergence of various instances of religious politicization, which has raised concerns that Indonesia may become increasingly intolerant (Chaplin, 2017). The book "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia" offers a fresh perspective in addressing these questions, which the author claims is relevant to Indonesia and other multi-religious democratic countries (Hamayotsu, 2014). Many commentators praise how Menchik presented various ideas accompanied by rich data and presented them in an easily readable manner (Atalay, 2018). The book is considered to contain three significant findings:

1. Social interactions determine the meaning of tolerance and attitudes toward minorities, not theological doctrines. By referring to various survey data and documents, Menchik demonstrates in his book that the three religious organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis) tend to be reactive to missionary movements, which influences their stance toward religious minority groups (Menchik, 2016, p. 16). It can be found in the chapter titled "Local Genealogies" and is considered by many commentators as the highlight of Menchik's book.
2. Menchik rejects the assumption that various cases of intolerance toward religious minority groups are the result of the post-Suharto regime's democratization process in 1998. Many parties believe that various small but vocal religious organizations, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia, intentionally exaggerate the deviance of Ahmadiyya to gain public sympathy. This phenomenon is closely related to the post-1998 political situation, which tends to be more democratic (Menchik, 2016, p. 65). Through his comparative historical analysis, Menchik finds that intolerance has a much longer history. According to Menchik, intolerance towards minority groups like Ahmadiyya is not a consequence of post-New Order democratization; instead, it is vital to the formation of nationalism (productive intolerance) and creates a sense of we-feeling (similar identity) that laid the foundation for Indonesia's independence. One of Menchik's fresh ideas is to explain how religious organizations like NU, Muhammadiyah, and

- Persis, in collaboration with the state, create a we-feeling, giving rise to godly nationalism.
3. Menchik presents a new understanding of tolerance that differs from the concept offered by Western secular-liberal perspectives. Instead of being individual-oriented, religious tolerance in Indonesia, as Menchik argues, is characterized as 'communal tolerance' (Aspinall, 2017).

## GODLY NATIONALISM

One of Menchik's significant ideas in the book "Islam and Democracy," which is the focus of this writing, is found in Chapter Four, which discusses godly nationalism (Menchik also published this idea as an article). There is no difference between the book edition and the journal article (Menchik, 2014b). In this chapter, Menchik opposes the common assumption that the increasing intolerance toward minority Islamic groups like Ahmadiyya in Indonesia over the past two decades is a result of democratization and decentralization after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 (Menchik, 2016, p. 65). Instead, based on historical analysis, illustrating this with the case of the closure of the Ahmadiyya mosque by the Batavia government in 1936, the misrepresentation of Ahmadiyya in 1920, 1930, 1980, and 2005 involving the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Menchik argues that intolerance has been present since long ago, even before Indonesia's independence (Menchik, 2016, p. 67).

Furthermore, Menchik states that various parties have accused Indonesia of lacking a precise model of democracy, as both the state and civil society have been unable to uphold the values of tolerance. However, Menchik disagrees with such accusations, arguing that religious tolerance exists among different faiths in Indonesia (Menchik, 2016, p. 66). Intolerance towards Ahmadiyya does not tend to extend to minority religious groups other than Islam, such as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. According to recent surveys, a large majority of Muslim civil society leaders believe that Ahmadiyya should not be allowed to hold public office, construct houses of worship, or teach Islamic studies. However, these same leaders believe that Christians and Hindus should have more religious and political freedom. Ahmadiyya appears to represent the boundaries of Indonesia's much-lauded "generally tolerant brand of Islam."

This ambivalent, tolerant attitude unsettles Menchik's mind. He offers an unconventional reading, arguing that instead of threatening unity, intolerance towards Ahmadiyya creates a form of nationalism that eventually led to the establishment of Indonesia. This nationalism is built on a sense of divine worship, which Menchik calls godly nationalism. According to Menchik, godly nationalism arises from a specific practice of placing minority groups as a common enemy, uniting various differences, as seen in the case of Ahmadiyya, through raising theological issues and accusations of blasphemy against Islam.

The concept of godly nationalism is rooted in the theory of an imagined community introduced by Benedict Anderson. This theory has faced criticism for considering religion in the construction of nationalism. Since the 1990s, various empirical surveys (some of which were mentioned in the previous chapters) show that the role of religion in the public sphere is strengthening, indicating the need to incorporate religion into the building of nationalism. Political scholars, such as Talal Asad, Hirschekind, Van der Veer, Lisa Wedeen, and Michael Laffan have introduced the concept of solidarity called the "umma," inspired by the Islamic world. Menchik

attempts to place religion in the construction of Indonesian nationalism. For him, the construction of Indonesian nationalism does not solely originate from Islamic sharia as the majority religion, but it is also not entirely secular. Menchik illustrates how the dynamics of Pancasila and the Jakarta Charter demonstrate that while the state places religious values as the basis of its national ideology, it does not lead to forming an Islamic state (Menchik, 2016, p. 72).

Menchik explains, "I theorize godly nationalism as an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society." In daily life, godly nationalism is seen as a guide to civic virtue, following the values of this form of nationalism.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST AHMADIYYA AS PRODUCTIVE INTOLERANCE**

Ahmadiyya, especially the Qodian faction, has been the target of intolerance and sometimes violence. The Indonesian Ahmadiyya Congregation (Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia/JAI) has struggled to gain recognition from the community, such as social programs and the legality of the law. However, JAI remains the target of intolerant groups to carry out persecution because the teachings adhered to by JAI are considered heretical due to different Islamic concepts in general (M. Ahmad et al., 2022). Various studies reveal various acts of violence experienced by Ahmadiyah, such as the destruction of houses of worship, physical attacks, and restrictions on rights in religion and politics (Sulistiyati, 2020; Andi Muh. Taqiyuddin Bn et al., 2022; Mursyidi et al., 2020; Simamora et al., 2020). Menchik's discussion of violence against Ahmadiyah is presented historically in his book. By tracing historical data since the 1920s, Menchik shows how the rejection of Ahmadiyya was carried out by mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Muhammadiyah, NU, and Persis, with support from local authorities.

Menchik reveals that from 1923 to 1929, Ahmadiyya had a harmonious relationship with Muhammadiyah, an organization aiming to modernize Islam. However, starting in 1925, their relationship deteriorated as Muhammadiyah leaders began to question Ahmadiyya's beliefs regarding the prophet Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his alleged ordinary death of prophet Isa. In that year, the Muhammadiyah tarjih council considered the dissemination of Ahmadiyya's teachings should be banned and issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya outside of Islam (Menchik, 2016, p. 74).

Persis showed similar attitude. In 1931, Ahmad Hassan, the leader of Persis, published a study on Ahmadiyya's beliefs about prophethood and the death of prophet Isa. Following a public debate in 1934, Persis' magazine "Pembela Islam" released an article stating that Ahmadiyya had deviated from Islam and declared it a deviant sect. This stance was followed by the establishment of the Committee for the Elimination of Ahmadiyya (Menchik, 2016, p. 75).

In addition to Muhammadiyah and Persis, Menchik explains the rejection of Ahmadiyya by NU. Although Persis and NU often engaged in debates on matters of taklid (imitation) and ijtihad (independent reasoning), they both declared Ahmadiyya a deviant sect. Throughout 1938–1939, NU even published a series of articles specifically discussing Ahmadiyya's propaganda and its connection to British imperialism and the issue of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad being considered a prophet. NU also explicitly rejected joining the Majelis Islam A'laa Indonesia (MIAI) initiated by modern Islamic groups.



This rejection was a protest because Ahmadiyya Lahore was surprisingly invited to join the council (Menchik, 2016, p. 77).

In 1943, the Japanese government dissolved MIAI and established the Masyumi Party, which later transformed into the Office of Religious Affairs, now known as the Ministry of Religious Affairs. One of the functions of this office was to oversee and control heterodox and deviant religious groups. According to Jeremy Menchik, this marks the beginning of godly nationalism practices in Indonesia, which indicates state involvement in intolerance towards minority groups like Ahmadiyya. The state's direct involvement in such practices became more apparent in 1965 when Sukarno issued Presidential Decree No. 1 of 1965, commonly known as the Blasphemy Law. According to Menchik, enacting this decree is a form of institutionalizing godly nationalism.

This decree is not unrelated to the political dynamics of Sukarno's government toward the end of his term. The political situation in the country heated up with the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia, which Sukarno perceived as a manifestation of British imperialism in Southeast Asia. In response, Sukarno sought to gather support by mobilizing the public through demonstrations against imperialism and other non-military approaches (Djakababa, 2009). One of Sukarno's efforts to gain support from the Muslim community was by issuing the blasphemy law. The law states: "Anyone is prohibited from deliberately stating, promoting, and seeking public support for interpretations of a religion practiced in Indonesia or carrying out religious activities that resemble the core teachings of that religion."

According to Menchik, this law formalizes the state's support for orthodox religion while being a lethal attack on heterodox religious minority groups like Ahmadiyya (Menchik, 2016, p. 79). Through the enactment of this law, Sukarno gained support from NU, Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII, Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia), which declared their support for Sukarno's agenda to unify nationalist, religious, and communist groups (NASAKOM) into one (Menchik, 2016, p. 81).

Menchik interprets Sukarno's actions as productive intolerance and reinforcement of godly nationalism through cooperation with MIAI as an Islamic organization and the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a government representative. Through such institutionalization, orthodox religious groups like Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism receive various facilities from the state, such as funding for the construction of places of worship, religious schools such as pesantren and madrasah, and various religious celebrations. Ten years after the enactment of the blasphemy law, Suharto established the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) as a non-governmental institution to serve as a platform for various Islamic organizations and represent the government's views in international Islamic organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) and the World Muslim League (Rabi'at al-Alam al-Islami). MUI is one of the organizations that rejects Ahmadiyya and initiates various anti-Ahmadiyya movements in countries such as Jordan, Mauritania, Mecca, and Pakistan. Ten years after its establishment, the MUI national congress issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya heretical, later reiterated in 2005 with the support of the hardline Islamic organization, FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) (Menchik, 2016, p. 81). Jeremy Menchik's historical analysis concludes with a summary of the trial of the National Alliance for the Freedom of Religion and Belief (AKKBB), which demanded that the Constitutional Court revoke the 1965 blasphemy law in 2009 but was rejected.

While Menchik's writing specifically addresses religious violence in Indonesia, few Indonesian scholars have critically analyzed Menchik's ideas, including the concept of

godly nationalism, or at least thoughtfully written about them. One of the few is Ahmad Zainul Hamdi. In his article "Populism and Ethno – Religious Violence: Reconsidering the Concept of Godly Nationalism in Issues of Protection for Religious Minority Groups in Indonesia," Hamdi earnestly discusses Menchik's argument on godly nationalism. Menchik's idea of seeing religious violence towards heterodox groups as ideological is not entirely accurate, according to Hamdi. He rejects Menchik's reading, which suggests that the state and civil society's involvement in intolerance against heterodox minority groups is in line with the ideology embraced by the Indonesian nation, namely godly nationalism (Hamdi & Wahid, 2017, p. 313).

According to Hamdi, the reading of religious violence toward heterodox groups comes from Menchik's historical analysis that overly focuses on macro – level data. However, if the concept of godly nationalism is applied to regional field data, it will appear inadequate, even in the case of Ahmadiyya, which is the focus of Menchik's discussion. According to him, instead of using an ideological approach, violence against heterodox religious groups results from pragmatic political maneuvers. Hamdi supports his argument by pointing out various situations where Ahmadiyya could live peacefully without being targeted by intolerance; for example, after the central MUI issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya heretical in 1980 and 2005, the state did not respond with a ban on Ahmadiyya. Regional reactions began to emerge only after the release of the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB) Three Ministers in 2008 (Hamdi & Wahid, 2017, pp. 311 – 319).

The governors of West Java and East Java issued decrees banning the Indonesian Ahmadiyya Congregation (JAI) activities. However, it should be noted that not all regions showed a coopting attitude towards SKB Three Ministers. For instance, the governor of Yogyakarta, despite facing pressure from various parties, including Islamic scholars and organizations, firmly refused to issue a ban on Ahmadiyya, possibly due to his close familial ties with many local Kiai (Islamic scholars).

We can understand the brutal political nature that seeks power and the dream of hardline Islamic groups to establish an Islamic state. However, how can we explain the involvement of moderate Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah in cases of intolerance toward heterodox Islamic groups? By further examining Menchik's book "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia," its third chapter titled "Local Genealogies" provides a more satisfactory answer than the concept of godly nationalism. According to Menchik, the tolerance level within Islamic organizations varies depending on their efforts to mitigate the missionary movements launched by non – Islamic groups (Menchik, 2016, p. 36). Instead of interpreting it through the concept of godly nationalism, it may be more appropriate to view NU and Muhammadiyah's intolerance as a maneuver to protect their followers from Ahmadiyya's ideology. Concerns over Ahmadiyya are reasonable, as Sunni Islam and Ahmadiyya have fundamental differences regarding prophethood and the end times, even though they share attributes of Islam, which may create confusion in society. Religious organizations eventually interpret such concerns as a threat that needs to be eliminated. Such readings are consistent with the different attitudes of religious organizations at the regional level. For example, the NU Bondowoso Branch, in collaboration with MUI and the local government of Bondowoso, took a stance to protect Ahmadiyya. It may align with the religious organization's assessment of the threat faced.

## CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF GODLY NATIONALISM

In the previous section, the authors presented the implications of the concept of Godly Nationalism in understanding intolerance towards Ahmadiyya. This section aims to raise objections from the author and other scholars regarding Jeremy Menchik's concept of godly nationalism. Menchik's concept of godly nationalism originates from data collected over a century on the religious dynamics involving Ahmadiyya, civil society organizations, and the state. Many writers, especially those from the West, appreciate the depth of Menchik's data. Additionally, Menchik's skill in crafting sentences makes historical data, typically considered dull, more enjoyable to read. However, despite being supported by rich empirical data, many scholars criticize Menchik's concept of godly nationalism. Menchik surprisingly and hastily concludes that political dynamics are a manifestation of godly nationalism. For instance, Menchik wrote that President Soekarno's 1965 Presidential Decree on blasphemy was an institutionalization of nationalism. I disagree with this claim.

To understand our objection to Menchik, let us start by highlighting how Menchik portrays Soekarno's stance towards Ahmadiyya: "And when Soekarno was accused of being an Ahmadi, he also used the Ahmadi question as an opportunity to denounce his enemies. He wrote that although he admired Ahmadiyya for its rationalism and modernism, it was also 'devoted to British imperialism.'"

Without verifying the source of Jeremy Menchik's quote, one may quickly assume that Soekarno had sentimental views towards Ahmadiyya. Therefore, it is essential to understand the context of "devoted to British imperialism," as quoted by Menchik. Such a statement was written by Soekarno during his exile in Ende when sudden rumors emerged that he was an Ahmadi and had even established an Ahmadiyya branch in Sulawesi. In response, Soekarno wrote a letter to his correspondent, A. Hasan, stating that he was not an Ahmadi. In the same letter, Soekarno mentioned that he had read and admired the works of Ahmadiyya scholars. Still, at the same time, he disagreed with Ahmadiyya's views on Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet and perceived Ahmadiyya's closeness to British imperialism.

"Hence, although there are certain aspects of Ahmadiyya that I disagree with and even reject, such as their veneration of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and their affinity toward British imperialism, I still feel obliged to acknowledge and appreciate the benefits and insights I have gained from their rational, modern, broadminded, and logical writings." ("Soerat Dari Ir Soekarno Dari Ende," 1936)

By reading his letter, it becomes evident that Soekarno's attitude towards Ahmadiyya involved both admiration and expressions of disagreement, which is a common reaction. Therefore, Soekarno's refutation of the accusation of being an Ahmadiyya follower cannot be interpreted as a rejection of Ahmadiyya or a denial of its existence in Indonesia.

Based on this assumption, we refute Menchik's claim that Soekarno's 1965 Presidential Decree was an institutionalization of godly nationalism that positioned Ahmadiyya as a target of productive intolerance. As Menchik described in his book, the last years of Soekarno's rule were marked by political turmoil caused by Malaysia and England. We believe that the issuance of the 1965 decree cannot be dissociated from Soekarno's efforts to garner support from the majority Muslim population of Indonesia and other Islamic nations as after issuing the Presidential Decree in 1965, Soekarno declared himself as the 'Leader of the Islamic World' and garnered support from various organizations in Islamic countries (Menchik, 2016, p. 81).

This perspective is also echoed by R. William Liddle, a renowned Indonesianist and Political Science Professor from Ohio University. He rejects Menchik's view that violence against Ahmadiyya constitutes productive intolerance. According to Liddle, Menchik has disregarded the freedom of religion as a fundamental human right. Liddle argues that instead of representing godly nationalism, the 1965 Presidential Decree should be seen as conflicting with the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom for every citizen (Liddle, 2014).

Ira and Saul Allen present another criticism in their paper titled "God Terms and Activity System: A Definition of Religion for Political Science." They argue that Menchik's idea of the relationship between religion and the state within the framework of nationalism overlooks the possibility that nationalism itself may be an expression of religious characteristics unique to Indonesia (Allen & Allen, 2016). This perspective offers a new interpretation of the formulation of Pancasila, explaining why Islamic nationalist figures willingly removed clauses with Islamic nuances. Rather than seeing it as a failure, this acceptance can be understood as a reconciliation between nationalism and religion in Indonesia's historical context, particularly concerning Islam (Sidel, 2012).

It is widely recognized that Indonesia's independence was achieved after centuries of struggle against colonization. It was a tremendously challenging journey. Initially, the fight against colonialists was carried out by local authorities through regional wars, which ultimately resulted in colonial victory. The continuous suffering and oppression experienced by the Indonesian people forged a bond based on shared struggles, leading to the birth of nationalism as the foundation of the national movement (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). It must be acknowledged that in this process, the national movement involved all elements of society, including both Islamic and secular nationalists. Considering this fact, Menchik's concept of godly nationalism seems to reduce Indonesia's nationalism, built on the anti-colonial movement, into one that is intolerant toward Ahmadiyya and other heterodox religious groups, as he wrote, "For a godly nation to endure, it must privilege some beliefs and prosecute acts of deviance as blasphemy" (Menchik, 2016, p. 67).

## **GODLY NATIONALISM IN THE DISCOURSE OF SECULARISM**

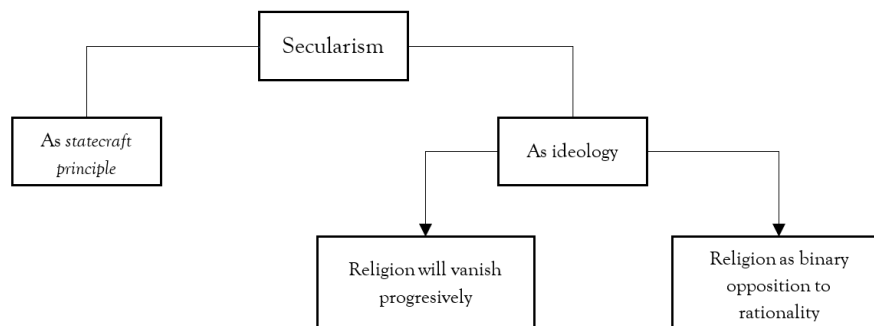
In formulating his conception of godly nationalism, Menchik draws upon Benedict Anderson's seminal imagined community framework, albeit without robustly integrating the discourse of secularism, a lacuna evident in both Western and Eastern (Islamic) contexts. Consequently, Menchik's thesis concerning the intricate interplay between religiosity and statecraft stands vulnerable to scrutiny. This discourse seeks to delineate the inadequacies of Menchik's theoretical underpinnings by scrutinizing them through the lens of secularism. Menchik postulates that the ideological foundation of the Indonesian nation situates itself at the nexus of secularism and theocracy. Citing prominent Indonesian Muslim figures such as Maman Abdurrahman of Persis (Menchik, 2016, p. 65) and Abdul Muti of Muhammadiyah (Menchik, 2016, p. 85), Menchik contends that the presence of religious freedom signifies Indonesia's departure from a strict religious orthodoxy, yet simultaneously asserts limits to this freedom. This nuanced stance moderates the interface between state governance and religious prerogatives within Indonesia. Despite initial appearances, Menchik's characterization presents a simplification fraught with conceptual challenges. By juxtaposing the secular state and theocracy as diametric opposites, Menchik implicitly frames secularism in

adversarial opposition to the notion of an Islamic state. As articulated by Menchik, such categorical distinctions inherently oversimplify the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the symbiosis of religion and governance.

"As I will show, Indonesian nationalism continues to be rooted in religious solidarities even while it is not an Islamic state. My argument challenges scholarly conceptions of the triumph of the 'secular' state and the failure of its counterpart, the Islamic state, by mapping the genealogy of the godly state and its concurrent practices" (Menchik, 2014a, p. 71)

This proposition warrants careful reconsideration due to its inaccuracies and premature assertions. As articulated by Talal Asad, secularism emerges as a concept shaped by the intricate historical dynamics characterizing the relationship between religion and the state in the Western context, particularly within Europe (Asad, 2017). Menchik's oversight lies in his failure to acknowledge Indonesia's distinct trajectory, where the nation has yet to undergo a pronounced process of secularization. Religion has persistently retained a symbiotic relationship with the state, and the endeavor to delineate a clear separation between state and religion has not inherently yielded pejorative connotations towards religious belief.

In light of Jose Casanova's elucidation of secularism, which delineates between secularism as an ideological framework and a constitutional principle, Menchik's analysis falls short in elucidating the nuanced perspectives and rationales underlying the rejection of secularism voiced by various Muslim leaders in Indonesia. It underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive approach in discerning the intricacies of religious and state dynamics within Indonesia while also considering the cultural and historical contextual factors that shape interpretations of concepts such as secularism.



**Figure 1** Jose Casanova's Secularism (Casanova, 2006)

Understanding the various manifestations of secularism rejection by prominent Muslim figures is imperative for elucidating the complex relationship between statecraft and religious ethos in Indonesia. Such an endeavor is necessitated by the inherently dynamic nature of Islamic discourse concerning the configuration of the state, where both outright rejection and nuanced endorsements of secularism are discernible; despite doctrinal divergences among the Shia, Khawarij, and Sunni sects, the trajectory of Islamic secularization has been shaped by two pivotal junctures: firstly, the demise of Prophet Muhammad, emblematic of both religious and political leadership, and secondly, the promulgation of the Medina Charter by the Prophet as a blueprint for a more inclusively pluralistic societal framework (Rizkita, 2023). Concurrently, within the



sphere of Western influence, intellectuals such as Naquib Al – Attas, while vociferously opposing secularism, concede to its nuanced complexity, acknowledging its inherent inextricability from contemporary sociopolitical narratives (Al – Attas, 1993). Though dissenting from the notion of relegating religion to a privatized realm, Al – Attas rejects that the division between state and religion could be reconcilable as long as it remains in line with Sharia principles. Thus, upon closer scrutiny, when evaluated through the prism of secularist discourses, both Western and Islamic, Menchik's thesis concerning the Indonesian interplay between religiosity and statecraft is found wanting.

Binary modes of cogitation in navigating the interplay of religiosity within the crucible of power, as propounded by Menchik, often furnish a reductive analytical framework. According to Cavanaugh, adherents of secularism tend to cast religion as an irrational font of violence, thereby advocating its disentanglement from the political arena as a corrective measure against its perceived disruptive potential. Concurrently, this stance tacitly legitimates state – sanctioned violence under the guise of rationality. However, Derrida cogently argues that such binary epistemologies are inherently untenable, for notwithstanding the concerted efforts of secularist ideologues to divorce themselves from religious antecedents, the very genesis of secularism is deeply entrenched within the Judeo – Christian historical continuum. Furthermore, such dichotomous perspectives preclude the exploration of alternative paradigms regarding the ethical and moral function of religion within the public domain, constituting an indispensable underpinning for the exigencies of modern democratic governance.

In Western secularism discourse, the conceptual boundary between religion and statecraft has undergone a discernible paradigmatic shift toward a more accommodating stance to religious pluralism. As elucidated in the post – secularist discourse pioneered by Jurgen Habermas, the duality of religion and statecraft is not seen as mutually exclusive entities but as complementary domains within the public sphere. This epistemic synthesis, encapsulated within the notion of Institutional Translation Proviso (ITP) (Habermas, 2006), engenders a dialectical dialogue between religion and state, fostering a nuanced modality of governance predicated upon mutual respect and deliberative engagement.

## CONCLUSION

Undeniably, the concept of the relationship between religion and the state, as portrayed in the idea of godly nationalism, is not unfamiliar to us. The most intriguing aspect for the writer lies in the implications of godly nationalism. Menchik contends that the violence against Ahmadiyya is an endeavor to safeguard godly nationalism, thereby representing a form of productive intolerance. Regrettably, the concept of godly nationalism is deemed excessively centered on macro data and lacks sufficient explanatory power concerning the predicament experienced by Ahmadiyya in different regions.

In conclusion, the discourse on godly nationalism within the framework of secularism, particularly in the Indonesian context, as examined by Menchik, presents a complex interplay between religiosity and statecraft. While Menchik's thesis attempts to navigate this intricate relationship, it fails to integrate the discourse of secularism fully, thus leaving his theoretical underpinnings vulnerable to scrutiny. His characterization of secularism and theocracy as diametric opposites oversimplifies the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the symbiosis of religion and state.

Further analysis through the lens of secularism, as elucidated by scholars like Talal Asad and Jose Casanova, reveals the inadequacies of Menchik's arguments. The rejection of secularism by various Muslim leaders in Indonesia and the nuanced perspectives within Islamic discourse underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding the interplay between religiosity and statecraft. Binary modes of cogitation, as proposed by Menchik, are deemed reductive, especially in light of post-secularist discourse that advocates for a more accommodating stance toward religious pluralism within the public sphere.

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