

## BETWEEN ISOTHYMIA AND MEGALOTHYMIA: ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS-BASED IDENTITY POLITICS IN INDONESIA

Arfi Hidayat<sup>\*1</sup>, Muhammad Rizkita<sup>2</sup>, Waryani Fajar Riyanto<sup>3</sup>, Sirajun Nasih<sup>4</sup>

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, E-Mail: [arfihidayat115@gmail.com](mailto:arfihidayat115@gmail.com)  
 Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, E-Mail: [muhammadrizkita25@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadrizkita25@gmail.com)  
 Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, E-Mail: [waryani.riyanto@uin-suka.ac.id](mailto:waryani.riyanto@uin-suka.ac.id)  
 Sirajun Nasih, STIT Palapa Nusantara, Indonesia, E-Mail: [nasih21271@gmail.com](mailto:nasih21271@gmail.com)

\*Corresponding Authors



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### Abstract

This article seeks to analyze the phenomenon of religious politics in Indonesia using Francis Fukuyama's concept of thymos. The 1945 constitution of Indonesia guaranteed the freedom of religion, yet on the one hand, it also provided explanations for six beliefs as definitive religions. This triggers the marginalization of adherents of traditional beliefs, with their rights not fully accommodated by the state. Thymos shape social and political life, and individuals or groups, when feeling that their thymotic needs are not met, may demand political recognition. Fukuyama explains two patterns of thymos: 1) isothymia, referring to the desire for equal recognition in terms of dignity, values, and identity, and 2) megalothymia, representing the desire for recognition as superior. The findings in this article indicate that religious identity politics in Indonesia are reflected through these two patterns of isothymia and megalothymia, evident in the tumultuous journey of marginalized local belief identities and in identity politics directed towards religion-based dominations.

**Keywords:** Francis Fukuyama, thymos, identity politics, freedom of religion

### Abstract

Undang-undang Dasar Negara Indonesia telah menjamin kebebasan beragama dan keyakinan, namun di sisi lain, juga terdapat penjelasan tentang enam kepercayaan sebagai agama definitif. Hal ini memicu marginalisasi para penganut kepercayaan tradisional. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena politik agama di Indonesia dengan menggunakan konsep thymos dari Francis Fukuyama. Thymos digambarkan sebagai gairah untuk memperoleh pengakuan atas identitas dan nilai bawaan yang dianut. Apabila kebutuhan thymotic mereka tidak terpenuhi, dapat menuntut pengakuan politik melalui ekspresi politik identitas. Fukuyama menjelaskan dua pola thymos: 1) isothymia, yang mengacu pada keinginan untuk pengakuan yang sama dalam hal martabat, nilai, dan identitas, dan 2) megalothymia, yang mewakili keinginan untuk diakui sebagai yang superior. Temuan dalam artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa politik identitas agama di Indonesia tercermin melalui dua pola isothymia dan megalothymia, yang terbukti dalam perjalanan berliku identitas kepercayaan lokal yang terpinggirkan dan dalam politik identitas yang ditujukan kepada dominasi berbasis agama.

**Keywords:** Francis Fukuyama, thymos, politik identitas, kebebasan beragama

### Background

In the second half of the 21st century, political fundamentals, previously defined by economic concerns, began to shift toward a spectrum centered on identity.<sup>1</sup> This shift does not imply the marginalization of economic aspects; economics retains its importance but is no longer as paramount as identity. People have become more driven by the need to have their identity recognized. This transition has caught the attention

of both far-right and left-wing political groups. Left-wing movements have broadened their focus from economic equality to include the interests of marginalized groups, such as feminism, civil rights for Black Americans, refugee rights, and the liberation of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) communities. Simultaneously, the far-right has reinvented itself as a patriotic-nationalist faction, aiming to

<sup>1</sup> F. Fukuyama, '30 Years of World Politics: What Has Changed?', *Journal of Democracy*, 31 (2020), pp. 11–21, doi:10.1353/jod.2020.0001.

safeguard traditional national identities, often linked to race, ethnicity, or religion.<sup>2</sup>

This article will explore the role of religious identity in Indonesia through the lens of Francis Fukuyama's theoretical framework. According to Fukuyama, identity politics arises from the solidarity of social groups that have experienced marginalization due to their identity.<sup>3</sup> For instance, being African-American makes individuals more vulnerable to racism.<sup>4</sup> The oppression of identity leads to reactions like exploitation,<sup>5</sup> persecution, marginalization<sup>6</sup>, or cultural imperialism<sup>7</sup>. This reaction occurs because of the lived experiences of the subject under an unjust social structure.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, identity politics refers to the actions of individuals or groups who perceive a lack of recognition or a threat to their dignity. They may resort to identity politics to demand recognition and assert their value, which can be seen as part of a broader struggle for universal political belonging.<sup>9</sup> Drawing from Plato, Fukuyama asserts that the psychological need for society to recognize one's identity is a fundamental aspect of human nature.<sup>10</sup> Over time, the struggle for recognition has evolved through various historical contexts, with collective movements driving the polarization of contemporary identity politics.

Fukuyama identifies two patterns in the human desire for recognition and dignity: *isothymia*

and *megalothymia*. *Isothymia* refers to the desire for equal recognition in terms of dignity, value, and identity, while *megalothymia* symbolizes the aspiration for superior recognition.<sup>11</sup> Both collectively and individually, humans express these patterns. The dilemma arises when marginalized identity groups, driven by strong thymotic demands, compete for recognition, creating tension and conflict.

Fukuyama also emphasizes that while liberal democracy fosters human equality, it does not guarantee full rights for all citizens, particularly for those who have experienced historical marginalization.<sup>12</sup> If a society continues to exhibit gaps in the recognition of oppressed, exploited, or marginalized groups, identity politics is likely to emerge as a response.

What, then, is the face of identity politics in Indonesia? While Indonesia, as a democratic country with Pancasila as its philosophical foundation, guarantees equality for all citizens at the normative level, still face marginalization.<sup>13</sup> This condition poses a challenge to democratization in Indonesia, as decentralization during the reform era has led to the politicization of identity. This has given rise to local elites, often referred to as "local kings," who seek recognition and assert their dignity, contributing to identity-based political polarization and the potential for conflict.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'Why National Identity Matters', *Journal of Democracy*, 29.4 (2018), pp. 5–15.

<sup>3</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Efrén O. Pérez, C. Robertson, and Bianca V. Vicuña, 'Prejudiced When Climbing Up or When Falling Down? Why Some People of Color Express Anti-Black Racism', *American Political Science Review*, 117 (2022), pp. 168–83, doi:10.1017/S0003055422000545.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Muller, 'Exclusion and Exploitation: The Incarceration of Black Americans from Slavery to the Present', *Science*, 374 (2021), pp. 282–86, doi:10.1126/science.abj7781.

<sup>6</sup> Pérez, Robertson, and Vicuña.

<sup>7</sup> Kizito Michael George, 'Scientism and the Evolution of Philosophies and Ideologies of Structural Racism against Africans', *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 2022, doi:10.4314/ft.v11i3.4.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Cressida Heyes, *Identity Politic: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, First Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Satryo Pringgo Sejati and Ahmad Burhan Hakim, 'Politik Primordial Dan Politik Identitas Dalam Perkembangan Demokrasi Dan Politik Lokal Di Indonesia', *JOSH: Journal of Sharia*, 2023, doi:10.55352/josh.v2i2.533; C. Hoon, 'Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Hybridity: The Dilemmas of the Ethnic Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia', *Asian Ethnicity*, 7 (2006), pp. 149–66, doi:10.1080/14631360600734400.

<sup>14</sup> Sugit Sanjaya Arjon, 'Religious Sentiments In Local Politics', *Jurnal Politik*, 3.2 (2018), p. 171, doi:10.7454/jp.v3i2.123.

History records various instances of identity-driven conflict in Indonesia, such as the Muslim-Christian clashes in Poso in 1998, efforts by Islamic fundamentalists to replace Pancasila with a caliphate, and the use of tribal and ethnic identities as electoral bases in political contests.<sup>15</sup> These conflicts reflect Fukuyama's analysis of isothymia and megalothymia, where the marginalized demand recognition while dominant groups assert their superior status.

This dynamic also plays out in the intersection of religious and political identity in Indonesia. Religious political identity is shaped by the tension between citizens' freedom of religion, as guaranteed by Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution, and the state's selective recognition of only six official religions. This discrepancy leads to the marginalization and persecution of adherents of traditional beliefs such as Wetu Telu, Kejawen, and Sapto Dharmo.

On the other hand, Jeremy Menchik's concept of "godly nationalism" suggests that mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, perpetuate a form of productive intolerance toward minority groups like the Ahmadiyah. Godly nationalism arises from practices that exclude minority groups and reinforce national identity politics through religion.<sup>16</sup>

The above discussion calls for a deeper reflection on the dynamics of religious identity politics in Indonesia. Using Fukuyama's perspective on identity politics, this article critically examines religious identity in Indonesia and offers recommendations to mitigate the underlying tensions. Fukuyama's concepts of isothymia and

megalothymia provide a framework for understanding these dynamics, while Menchik's theory of godly nationalism offers insights into how religious identity politics can drive exclusion.<sup>17</sup>

The disconnect between Article 29 of the Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom, and the official recognition of only a few religions contributes to identity-based turmoil. This not only affects marginalized traditional religions but can also foster conflict among the six officially recognized religions.<sup>18</sup> The root of these problems lies in unrecognized rights and the demand for identity recognition.

By incorporating Fukuyama's, Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and Menchik's godly nationalism, this article aims to offer a path toward navigating the complexities of religious identity politics in Indonesia.

### **Identity Politics in Indonesia**

The noble primordial identity in the middle of the archipelago is a source of culture for the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia, but this can also trigger the emergence of ethnic, religious, racial, tribal, and ideology-based identity politics.<sup>19</sup> Indonesia has socio-historically experienced the bitter experience of identity politics, as evidenced by the outbreak of conflict and violence based on ethnic and religious identity in Poso, Ambon, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan.<sup>20</sup>

The severity of identity politics is evident after the downfall of Suharto's regime.<sup>21</sup> History records that the Suharto regime had full control over the social and political order through monopolizing and constructing national identity, with Pancasila

<sup>15</sup> Agus Supratikno, 'Politik Identitas Dikaji Dari Perspektif Sosio-Historis Pembentukan Identitas Nasional Indonesia: -', *SAMI: Jurnal Sosiologi Agama Dan Teologi*, 1.1 (2023), pp. 1–22.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Menchik, 'Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56.3 (2014), pp. 591–621, doi:10.1017/S0010417514000267.

<sup>17</sup> Menchik, 'Productive Intolerance'.

<sup>18</sup> Presidential Decree No. 1 of 1965, which was enacted by Law No. 5 of 1969. The explanation states that Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and

Confucianism are the religions practiced by the population in Indonesia. The rest are not called religions but schools of belief or mysticism that are part of the cultural heritage of the ancestors.

<sup>19</sup> Supratikno.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Syafii. Maarif, *Politik Identitas Dan Masa Depan Pluralisme Kita* (Pusat Studi Agama dan Demokrasi, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Rachael Diprose, Dave McRae, and Vedi R. Hadiz, 'Two Decades of Reformasi in Indonesia: Its Illiberal Turn', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 49.5 (2019), pp. 691–712, doi:10.1080/00472336.2019.1637922.

as the sole principle in the state.<sup>22</sup> The implication is that groups that challenge the definition of Pancasila or hold alternative perspectives face accusations of being state enemies and subversives. This also applies to identity groups that need recognition. In the Suharto era, these groups tended to be passive and gave up their natural needs to demand recognition because the price to pay was to deal directly with an authoritarian and repressive government.<sup>23</sup>

This condition has led to identity confusion in Indonesian society.<sup>24</sup> Besides, it illustrates how identity politics unfold in Indonesia, where the state exercises discretion in deciding which groups to include and exclude.<sup>25</sup> After the fall of the Suharto regime, the passivity that resulted from fear during this repressive and authoritarian regime rose up in the face of identity politics, which then gave birth to conflict and violence as Chris Wilson said that Indonesia's democracy has not fully removed key causes of identity-based conflict, despite stability and reforms, partly due to the order of reforms after Suharto's resignation.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of inter-religious and ethnic conflicts in various parts of Indonesia, such as Poso, Ambon, and Kalimantan, resulted in collective violence. Between 1997 and 2001, there were more than 2,444 incidents and approximately 10,247 deaths resulting from these clashes. Religious and ethnic disputes caused the majority of the deaths. Inter-ethnic fights claimed the lives of nearly 9,612 Indonesians, with religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians accounting for half of the victims (5,452 in 433

incidents). In addition, 4,122 people were victims of ethnic sentiment and hatred, with violence against ethnic Chinese resulting in the deaths of 1,259 people in 32 incidents. Fighting between Madurese and Dayak/Malays in Sambas and Sampit claimed the lives of 2,764 people in 70 incidents.<sup>27</sup>

The rise of Islamic identity politics, especially by fundamentalist groups, has led to physical and symbolic violence.<sup>28</sup> Physical violence includes the closure of churches and mosques, as well as direct harm to individuals. Symbolic violence takes the form of insulting writings or lectures about other religions. Various fundamentalist groups, such as MMI<sup>29</sup>, FPI<sup>30</sup>, HTI<sup>31</sup>, and PKS, are increasingly pushing for the implementation of Islamic Sharia, either through revolution or constitutional channels. Although they have different approaches, they share the goal of implementing Islamic law in Indonesia. Nevertheless, organizations such as FPI and PKS still recognize the ideology of Pancasila.

From the description above, based on socio-history in Indonesia, identity politics often appear and cause tensions among Indonesian citizens, especially in the context of religious identity politics. Even today, religious sentiment frequently serves as the foundation for identity politics across various domains, thereby intensifying conflict.

### **Francis Fukuyama's Thymos Concept**

In his work, Fukuyama draws on a long tradition in political philosophy that dates back to

<sup>22</sup> Supratikno.

<sup>23</sup> Yuwanto Yuwanto, 'POLITICS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON INDONESIA AND SOUTH KOREA', *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik*, 3.1 (2013), pp. 117–22, doi:10.14710/politika.3.1.2012.117-122.

<sup>24</sup> Azyumardi Azra, 'Kegalauan Identitas Dan Kekerasan Sosial: Multikulturalisme, Demokrasi Dan Pancasila', *EMPATI: Jurnal Ilmu Kesejahteraan Sosial*, 1.1 (2012), pp. 1–12, doi:10.15408/empati.v1i1.9656.

<sup>25</sup> Ann L. Phillips, 'The Impact of Identity Politics on the Monopoly on the Use of Force', *Identity Politics: The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Chris Wilson, 'Illiberal Democracy and Violent Conflict in Contemporary Indonesia', *Democratization*, 22 (2015), pp. 1317–37, doi:10.1080/13510347.2014.949680.

<sup>27</sup> Arjon.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif.

<sup>29</sup> Abdul Jamil Wahab, 'MAJELIS MUJAHIDIN MENUJU INDONESIA BERSYARIAT', *Harmoni*, 22.1 (2023), pp. 234–47, doi:10.32488/harmoni.v1i22.686.

<sup>30</sup> Firmanda Taufiq and Ahalla Tsauro, 'Radical Turn: The Case of Front Persaudaraan Islam (Neo-FPI) in Indonesia', *Journal of Asian Wisdom and Islamic Behavior*, 2.1 (2024), doi:10.59371/jawab.v2i1.67.

<sup>31</sup> Syaiful Arif, 'Kontradiksi Pandangan HTI Atas Pancasila', *Jurnal Keamanan Nasional*, 2 (2016), doi:10.31599/jkn.v2i1.36.

Plato.<sup>32</sup> Continuing Plato's Eleutheria concept of fulfilling the nature of being a rational human being by controlling Epithumia (the need for food and sex) and thymos (what is in the chest; the feeling of power) through ratio (what is in the head) or rationality.<sup>33</sup> Fukuyama continues this more profound distinction of thymos.

"Thymos" is a concept introduced by Francis Fukuyama in his book "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment," published in 2018. In this work, Fukuyama examines the role of "thymos" as a key element in human identity and its impact on contemporary politics. "Thymos" means spirit and represents the desire for recognition, honor, and dignity.<sup>34</sup>

Thymos is an important aspect of human identity. It reflects the inherent need for humans to be recognized, and respected for their value and dignity. Thymos is more than just material needs and desires; it encompasses the demand for recognition and respect for one's innate worth. Fukuyama posits that society or the outside world naturally recognizes humans for their true selves. Even this has a bearing on human biology and psychology.<sup>35</sup> This desire for recognition is an integral part of human nature, and this has led to the emergence of identity politics in the modern sense of identity.<sup>36</sup>

Thymos closely aligns with an individual's sense of dignity and self-worth. It further relates to self-esteem and dignity in that it is the desire to be seen as a valuable and respected human being, regardless of achievement. This concept recognizes that humans seek recognition not only for their achievements but also for their inherent worth as human beings.<sup>37</sup>

Fukuyama argues that thymos plays an important role in shaping social and political

dynamics. The desire for recognition of one's worth and dignity can give rise to various forms of political and social action. Individuals or groups feeling unmet thymotic needs may demand recognition through political participation, social movements, or identity politics.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of "thymos" is central to Fukuyama's analysis of identity politics. Fukuyama argues that identity-based movements and political polarisation often arise from frustration over unmet thymotic needs. Individuals or groups may resort to identity politics to demand recognition and assert their worth when they perceive their dignity as unrecognized or threatened.<sup>39</sup>

Fukuyama recognizes that clashing ideologies can lead to social and political conflict. When different identity groups with strong thymotic demands meet, their competing demands for recognition can create tension and conflict. This clash of thymos is a significant driver of contemporary political polarization.<sup>40</sup>

Fukuyama explores the role of liberal democracy in fulfilling thymotic needs. He argues that liberal democracy, with its emphasis on individual rights and the protection of human dignity, provides a framework for recognizing and respecting the inherent values of society. However, Fukuyama recognizes the great challenge of balancing individual rights and group identity within this framework.<sup>41</sup>

Francis Fukuyama introduced the concepts of "isothymia" and "megalothymia" in his book "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment." Individuals and groups use these terms to describe different aspects of the human desire for recognition.

Isothymia refers to the desire for equal recognition. Recognizing individuals or groups as

<sup>32</sup> Joshua Makalintal, 'Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition by Francis Fukuyama', *Politikon: The LAPSS Journal of Political Science*, 43 (2019), doi:10.22151/politikon.43.5.

<sup>33</sup> Mogens Herman Hansen, 'Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 50.1 (2010), pp. 1–27.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*.

<sup>37</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.16.

<sup>38</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.16.

<sup>39</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.16.

<sup>40</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.14.

<sup>41</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity* 28-29.

equal to others in terms of their dignity, worth, and identity is essential. The characteristics of this are: 1) Equality: Isothymia is rooted in the principle of equality. People with isothymic concerns seek recognition based on their humanity, emphasizing that they should be treated with equal respect and dignity. 2) Inclusiveness: Isothymia emphasizes inclusiveness and a sense of belonging. It implies that no one should be excluded or marginalized based on their identity and that all people should have an equal place in society. 3) Anti-discrimination: Isothymia often manifests as a demand for anti-discrimination measures, equal rights, and equal treatment under the law. This is closely related to the concepts of social justice and fairness. Civil rights movements, like the American Civil Rights movement, strive for equal legal recognition and rights for marginalized racial groups. Such movements advocating for gender equality and women's rights demand equal recognition for women in various aspects of society.<sup>42</sup>

Megalothymia, on the other hand, represents the desire for recognition beyond equality. The desire for recognition as superior, exceptional, or different from others is known as megalothymia. Individuals or groups with megalothymia concerns seek recognition for their unique qualities and achievements. The characteristics of megalothymia are: 1) Exceptionalism: Megalothymia is driven by a sense of exceptionalism. Those with megalothymia tendencies believe that they or their group have special attributes, characteristics, or achievements that make them superior to others. 2) Desire for Grandeur: Megalothymia often leads to a desire for grandeur and recognition on a grand scale. This involves the pursuit of prestige, dominance, and a sense of being "better" than others. 3) Recognition of Excellence: Megalothymia is associated with the desire to recognize superiority, whether in cultural, political, or other domains. Examples include nationalism

and ethnocentrism, where a particular group or country asserts its superiority over others. Another example can be seen in the quest for hegemony in international relations, where powerful nations seek recognition as the dominant actors in the world.<sup>43</sup>

"Isothymia" refers to the equally strong human impulse to perceive oneself as "just as good" as others. Megalothymia is what economist Robert Frank calls a "positional good"—something that is essentially indivisible because it is based on one's position relative to others.<sup>44</sup> The rise of modern democracy is the story of the displacement of megalothymia by isothymia: societies that recognized only a handful of elites were replaced by societies that recognized that everyone was essentially equal. In Europe, societies stratified by class began to recognize the rights of ordinary people, and nations once immersed in great empires sought separate and equal status. The great struggles in American political history—over slavery and segregation, workers' rights, and women's equality—ultimately demanded that the political system expand the circle of individuals recognized as having equal rights. But the story is more complicated than that. The quest for equal recognition of marginalized groups by society drives contemporary identity politics. However, the desire for equal recognition can easily shift into a demand for recognition of group superiority. This is a big part of the story of nationalism and national identity, as well as certain forms of extremist religious politics today.<sup>45</sup>

### **Isothymia and the Politics of Religious Identity**

As explained in the previous section, Fukuyama makes thymos the core claim of his identity politics. Fukuyama interprets thymos as the essence of recognition. In its development in contemporary society, this thymotic need is seen by Fukuyama as a way of being with two patterns: isothymia refers to the demand for recognition, and

<sup>42</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.15.

<sup>43</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, p.14.

<sup>44</sup> Robert H. Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> Fukuyama, *Identity*, 77.

the nature of isothymia is emancipatory and demands equality so that the need for recognition demanded focuses on the struggle to be recognized politically and equally. Megalothymia, on the other hand, is a demand for the need for power and recognition. However, its nature is to want to be recognised as superior, and the tendency of megalothymia is to oppress or passivize isothymia indirectly and structurally.

In this sub-section, the author will examine the evolution of religious identity politics in Indonesia, as embodied by the concept of isothymia. Fukuyama departs from seeing a portrait of the structure of contemporary society where political movements are characterised by identity; in this case, identity becomes a significant thing because humans in the contemporary era tend to always be driven to demand recognition to be considered equal.

The principle of equality is the foundation of isothymia. Individuals grappling with isothymia issues strive for acknowledgment of their humanity, stressing the importance of treating them with respect and equal dignity. This demand for respect and recognition is born out of injustices experienced by groups and individuals, or it can even occur when an identity group is not accommodated in a democratized manner, allowing this movement to move towards a more concrete movement and demanding its rights through identity politics.<sup>46</sup>

If we look at the actual situation in the context of religious identity politics in Indonesia, the construction of religion in Indonesia needs to be criticized again because there are contradictory points, and it has not fully implemented the mandate of Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution on the right to religion and belief.<sup>47</sup> The constitutional mandate at the normative level does provide

meaning that every citizen is free to embrace religion, and it becomes an absolute right for him without any state intervention, but on the one hand, the construction of religion in Indonesia at the same time only recognizes six definitive religions. This Indonesia religious construction is legitimized through the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 (PNPS) in 1965 concerning the prevention of abuse and blasphemy of religion, which states that Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Khonghu Cu. From this decree, it appears that the Indonesian government legitimises the existence of religions as world religions or transnational imported religions. The state endorses a definition of religion that includes a belief system based on scripture, clear teachings, and a prophet. According to this definition, a religion must have a holy book and a prophet, and it must believe in one God. However, if we use this definition as a benchmark, local religions have no legal space to express their beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, outside of the six definitive religions, adherents of local or traditional beliefs (indigenous religions) do not get space and rights from the state; in other words, the state has reduced local beliefs, which may be contradictory because it does not carry out the mandate of the constitution to provide rights and freedom of belief or religion.

In Indonesia, adherents of traditional beliefs still exist and spread from almost all corners of the island. For example, Sasak Wetu Telu Islam (Lombok, NTB), Minahasa belief, Merapu belief (Sumba island community), Aluk To Dolo (Toraja), Parmalim (Batak Land), Kaharingan (Dayak Kalimantan), Kejawen and Sapto Dharmo (Java Island), and others.<sup>49</sup> These beliefs still exist today, despite the waves of marginalization carried out by the state and society. Adherents of local or traditional beliefs live in private spaces with

<sup>46</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (Profile Books, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> ALFITRI, 'Religion and Constitutional Practices in Indonesia: How Far Should the State Intervene in the Administration of Islam?', *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 13.2 (2018), pp. 389–413, doi:10.1017/asjcl.2018.20.

<sup>48</sup> M. Wibisono, 'Definisi Agama Di Indonesia: Sebuah Dilema Agama Pribumi', in *Modul Sosialisasi Toleransi*

*Beragama* (Prodi S2 Studi Agama-Agama UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Samsul Maarif, 'Human (Relational) Dignity: Perspectives of Followers of Indigenous Religions of Indonesia', *Religions*, 14.7 (2023), p. 848, doi:10.3390/rel14070848.

believers full of noble wisdom. Here, indirectly, the involvement of the state as a lawmaker by constructing religion, which is only limited to six world religions, has indirectly created power relations as a result of the conspiracy of the state and religion to persecute, marginalize, and discriminate against the factual existence of local beliefs.<sup>50</sup>

The challenge lies in mapping the coexistence of religious adherents across official and unofficial religions. The reality in the field that gives full space to the definitive religion since it is legitimized by state law is that the community accepts it as it is (taken for granted) without any effort to be critical of the state's legitimacy of religion, so that discrimination, marginalization, and even persecution can thrive in a structured and entrenched society.<sup>51</sup>

The adherents of local or traditional beliefs are considered and positioned as the second society in the struggle of the nation-state. On the one hand, we recognize the teachings of local or traditional beliefs as a treasure of cultural heritage, yet we also marginalize and limit their social status in terms of administrative legality.<sup>52</sup> This implies that if a follower of traditional or local beliefs wishes to apply for an identity card (KTP), they cannot incorporate their local beliefs into the KTP, thereby compelling them to relinquish their identity to one of the six officially recognized definitive religions. They must select one or the other. The state has once again marginalized adherents of traditional or local beliefs.<sup>53</sup> Not only does it stop there, but local believers also experience difficulties in accessing administrative public services such as marriage

registration and birth certificates, as well as divorce certificates and death certificates.<sup>54</sup>

At the normative level, the construction of religion by the state has such implications for the marginalization and exclusion of adherents of local beliefs that their rights as citizens with beliefs that are different from the state's definitive religious construction have made it difficult for them in administrative matters in the public sphere. What is the situation in the field? Do the adherents of local beliefs find persecution at the practical level? Violence? Or even rejection?

Public policy also contributes to the realm of praxis by committing acts of violence against local or traditional beliefs. State actors in political policy mapping have perpetuated the marginalization of adherents of local beliefs.<sup>55</sup> The Wahid Institute's research reveals that this study also discusses the role of state actors in discriminating against and marginalizing adherents of local or traditional religious beliefs. Since 2013, the Wahid Institute has recorded 280 acts of violence, which is a percentage of 57% with 121 acts committed by non-state actors and 43% with 121 acts by state actors. The report identifies 17 regions where state actors have violated religious tolerance, with West Java having the highest number of cases, at 40. Other regions with significant cases include East Java with 19 cases, Central Java, with 10 cases, and Jakarta with 8 cases. Violations range from obstruction and prohibition of worship to discrimination and intimidation against minority groups.<sup>56</sup>

If drawn towards the lens of isothymia, traditional or local beliefs adherents are *vis-à-vis* isothymia. Local believers themselves indirectly embody the nature of isothymia, demanding public

<sup>50</sup> Sunder John Boopelan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency: A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites*. (Springer Nature, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> Wibisono.

<sup>52</sup> T Budiman, *Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Perspektif Multikulturalisme*. Jakarta: Balitbang Agama, (2009).

<sup>53</sup> Geiby Natalia Mandey and Hun Pinatik, 'Agama Dan Negara: Konstruksi Agama Sebagai Fenomena Marginalisasi Kepercayaan Lokal Minahasa Sulawesi Utara', *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama Dan Masyarakat*, 6.2 (2022), pp. 176–203, doi:10.14421/panangkaran.v6i2.2927.

<sup>54</sup> Uli Parulian Sihombing and others, 'The Challenges and Opportunities of the Constitutional Court Decision Implementation on Recognition of the Indigenous Religions in Indonesia', *Yuridika*, 36.2 (2021), pp. 493–508.

<sup>55</sup> Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Merawat Agama Dan Kepercayaan Nusantara," *Agama (Tua) Minahasa Dalam Mitos, Ritus Dan Kultus*," in *Agama Dan Kepercayaan Nusantara* (eLSA Press., 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Wahid Institute, *Laporan Tahunan Kebebasan Beragama/ Berkeyakinan Dan Intoleransi* (Wahid Institute, 2013).



recognition of its existence. Although it has not yet moved to a collective movement through identity politics, at least the adherents of local beliefs within themselves outwardly must have the desire to be recognized politically by the outside world. Basically, these local believers have a strong thymotic need, especially when their political rights as citizens are taken away, and they experience injustice, as the author has described above.

As Fukuyama has explained, whatever the product of democracy, both liberal and guided, as in the Indonesian context, has not been able to accommodate the rights fully and recognize the identity of citizens properly, or, in other words, solve the case of thymos, the nature of isothymia is that it will continue to demand recognition of equality, which according to Fukuyama is difficult to fulfill fully.<sup>57</sup>

Isothymiotic parties in Indonesia have made advocacy and recognition-seeking efforts to at least demand the recognition of their existence in the context of religious identity. The public administration side has made these demands for recognition. In 2017, the Constitutional Court (MK) formally examined Law No. 23/2006 on Population Administration, as amended by Law No. 24/2013 on Population Administration (Adminduk Law). The MK stated that the use of the term "religion" in Article 61 paragraph (1) and Article 64 paragraph (1) of the Civil Registration Law is contrary to the 1945 Constitution and has no binding legal force, as long as it does not include "belief." Consequently, the believers asked for the blanking of their religion column. In the end, the Constitutional Court decided to list their civil registration data as "penghayat kepercayaan" without disclosing the specifics of their beliefs.<sup>58</sup>

From here, a firm line can be drawn that isothymia seeks to fulfill its thymotic needs in the context of demands for recognition of local beliefs. However, as explained by Fukuyama, the nature of

isothymia is to continue to seek and demand recognition. Fukuyama realizes that even democratization cannot fully provide the right to recognition and its political rights on a practical level. At least, the movement carried out by the isothymiotic people by submitting a formal test has at least provided a space to exist for adherents of local beliefs, even though it has not had a significant impact.

Identity politics movements by people who experience injustice, such as adherents of local beliefs, tend to be passive movements. This is because the dominance of state identity is so entrenched and too strong that it marginalizes this group. At the normative level, it is true that democracy and national identity seem to position themselves as patriots who are ready to save the oppressed, but at the same time, in the praxis in the field, the marginalization experienced by the oppressed (isothymiotic) is actually caused by the great dominance and hegemony of national identity in the realm of the majority; this indirectly turns into megalothymiotic.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the thymotic need in an individual or group is sometimes isothymiotic, but at a certain stage it can transform into megalothymiotic. In other words, the isothymiotic seeks recognition, but at the same time, the megalothymiotic limits it with the thymotic spirit to feel superior, different, and unique.

Axel Honneth's philosophy of recognition provides a visionary mapping of the identity politics movement of local believers. Honneth developed a theory of justice as recognition.<sup>60</sup> Honneth defines justice as recognition in terms of respect. What is emphasized here is not equality but recognition of the dignity of each person or group. Justice in Honneth's conception is no longer equal distribution or economic equality but social respect and dignity. Honneth emphasizes that if their rights and dignity are recognized, they can realise themselves well.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*.

<sup>58</sup> Mahkamah Konstitusi RI, 'Penghayat Kepercayaan Masuk Kolom Agama Dalam KK Dan KTP | Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia', 2017

<<https://www.mkri.id/index.php?page=web.Berita&id=14105&me>> [accessed 23 November 2023].

<sup>59</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*.

<sup>60</sup> Axel Honneth, 'Recognition and Justice. Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice', *Acta Sociologica*, 47 (4) (2004).

In this context, we can understand the state as the institutionalization of recognition principles aimed at fostering mutual recognition among members or groups of society. The success of the state is measured by the extent to which it is able to create mutual recognition among its citizens so that each citizen or group has a healthy personal identity, recognizes each other, and can thus realize itself in social life properly. Realizing these things is a hallmark of a good society. Since justice is not oriented towards equality but rather towards the recognition of different social groups with different values and worldviews (i.e., with different concepts of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem), Honneth can devise a theory of pluralistic justice.<sup>61</sup> In the context of the political identity movement of local believers, justice can be placed on the recognition of "respect" from outside the group, which is well legitimized. Thus, the need for dignity and justice for recognition can be fulfilled, and the social order can run properly.

### **Megalothymia and Religious Political Identity**

Fukuyama argues that neither nationalism nor religion will disappear as a force in world politics. They will not disappear because, according to Fukuyama, contemporary liberal democracy has not fully resolved the problem of nationalism and religion. *Thymos* is the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity; *isothymia* is the demand to be respected on an equal basis with others; and *megalothymia* is the desire to be Fukuyama views state and religion as two sides of the same coin. Both emerged at a time of "social transition from traditional isolated agrarian societies to modern societies"; their ideologies were seen as the answer to society's loneliness and confusion; both indulged in notions of victimhood while blaming "outsiders"; and both sought recognition of dignity as a prerogative for their own groups.<sup>62</sup>

In the context of religious identity politics in Indonesia, in the previous section, the author explained that the state has perpetuated marginalization through the definitive construction of religion. This marginalization might create a potential conflict in Indonesia. Even though Indonesia maintains religious tolerance and the spirit of multiculturalism at the normative level, this does not rule out the possibility of intolerant actions at the praxis level.

Front If we reflect, *megalothymia* is a vis-à-vis religious identity in Indonesia, as can be seen from the many incidents of intolerance that have occurred in Indonesia, starting with inter-religious violence. Religious-based violence does not only target interfaith religious groups but also occurs among Islamic heterodox groups such as Ahmadiyah. Small-scale but vocal Islamic groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) carried out the violence against Ahmadiyah.<sup>63</sup> In addition, Christianity in Minahasa marginalizes, persecutes, and rejects local believers; this refers to the desire to be recognized by asserting that their people dominate and become the majority.<sup>64</sup>

Biased *Megalothymia* needs can also potentially occur when religion-based identity politics directed towards electoral elections leads to the election of leaders who may not have the necessary competencies or qualifications to lead, as their success often depends on their religious identity or the dominance of their religious sect. In addition, when ethnic or religious identity groups gain access to state power, they may prioritize their group's interests over those of the rest of society. This might lead to a biased distribution of resources and opportunities and undermine the principles of justice and equality.<sup>65</sup> We are quite familiar with this in Indonesia's identity politics landscape, at least every time there is a general election. People

<sup>61</sup> Fitzgerald Kennedy Sitorus, 'AXEL HONNETH Filsuf Generasi III Mazhab Frankfurt Bagian II: Perjuangan Untuk Pengakuan', *Majalah Basis*, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*.

<sup>63</sup> Muhammad Rizkita, 'Kegagalan Konsep Nasionalisme Bertuhan Jeremy Menchik Dan Alternatifnya

Dalam Membaca Kekerasan Beragama Di Indonesia' (Skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023).

<sup>64</sup> Mandey and Pinatik.

<sup>65</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'Why National Identity Matters'.

naturally perceive megalothymia as exceptional. They tend to believe that they or their group have special attributes, characteristics, or achievements that make them superior to others.

In order to elaborate on megalothymia in the context of religious political identity in Indonesia, Jeremy Manchik's findings on godly nationalism may be able to describe how the reflection of thymophobia affects the tendency of megalothymia in Indonesia.

According to Menchik in his book *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, the tolerant character of Indonesian Muslims has been shaped by the three largest Indonesian religious organisations, namely Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Persis.<sup>66</sup> These three organizations are considered the most vocal in voicing religious tolerance. Even so, all three often show an ambivalent attitude towards Ahmadiyah. According to Menchik, instead of condemning, these three groups tend to be silent, even agreeing to reject the presence of Ahmadiyah in Indonesia. Menchik considers that there is a limit between religious tolerance and religious liberalism. Regrettably, Ahmadiyah appears to surpass the limits of religious tolerance upheld by Islam in Indonesia.

Menchik finds the ambivalent attitude of the three religious organizations mentioned above disturbing. According to him, the explanation that violence against Ahmadiyah is a form of democratic failure is completely unsatisfactory.<sup>67</sup> Menchik takes a truly radical turn. Instead of thinking of intolerance towards Ahmadiyah as an act that damages and threatens unity, he thinks that intolerance towards Ahmadiyah instead forms a bond of we-feeling that ultimately forms Indonesian nationalism. Something he calls godly nationalism. According to Menchik, godly nationalism is born from a specific practice, namely the exclusion of minority groups. Labeling minority groups as a common enemy ultimately strengthens

unity. Menchik asserts that numerous multi-religious countries, such as Indonesia, exhibit this type of phenomenon.

Menchik said that the genealogy of godless nationalism has existed since the pre-independence era. Based on historical analysis dating back to the 1920s, Menchik managed to convincingly prove that cases of violence against Ahmadiyah did not occur as a result of democratization that became stronger after the collapse of the Suharto regime. According to Menchik, even before independence, violence against Ahmadiyah involving religious organizations had occurred. Meanwhile, along with Indonesian independence, godless nationalism became increasingly visible through the institutionalization of the state. The peak was when President Soekarno issued Presidential Regulation No. 1 of 1965 on the Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Blasphemy. According to Menchik, this regulation privileges one religion or religious sect over another, signifying the state's affirmation that godly nationalism forms the basis of Indonesian nationalism.<sup>68</sup>

Menchik defines nationalism as "an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society, which means a nationalism bound by orthodox theism mobilized by the state together with religious organizations. This definition interprets all forms of violence against minority groups, like Ahmadiyah, as the state's efforts to fortify godly nationalism."<sup>69</sup>

We should appreciate Menchik's courage in taking a new approach to understanding violence against minority groups in Indonesia. This also does not mean that Menchik's theory is free from critics; the author himself certainly does not condone and tolerate all forms of violence against minorities, regardless of the conspiracy between the state and the special religion. Therefore, in this case, the author uses Jeremy Menchik's glasses to reflect on

<sup>66</sup> Menchik, 'Productive Intolerance'.

<sup>67</sup> Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*, Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics (Cambridge University Press, 2016), doi:10.1017/CBO9781316344446.

<sup>68</sup> Muhammad Rizkita, 'Kegagalan Konsep Nasionalisme Bertuhan Jeremy Menchik Dan Alternatifnya Dalam Membaca Kekerasan Beragama Di Indonesia' [Skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023].

<sup>69</sup> Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*.

the politics of religious identity in Indonesia. Manchik's findings on godly nationalism are quite interesting if elaborated with Francis Fukuyama's identity politics thinking on megalothymia.

Godly nationalism can be seen as megalothymia because mainstream religions such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis perpetuate persecution and marginalisation as a result of Ahmadiyah (isothymia); this refers to the isothymiotic people whose rights are taken away and democracy has failed to give recognition to them. As previously explained, in this scenario, the state explicitly favours one religion or a select few religious sects while restricting others. This certainly triggers megalothymia, which can occur because they limit the rights of others; indirectly, of course, this is an effort to position themselves as superior. Godly nationalism is a form of state cooperation that provides special space only for some religions that it wants, so that the spirit of religion is based on the nationalism it makes with the state, which is aware that this perpetuates marginalisation and persecution of Ahmadiyah.

### Conclusion

It is a basic need for humans to fulfill themselves with recognition and dignity. Both isothymia and megalothymia are intertwined. Thymotic needs in individuals or groups are sometimes isothymiotic, but, at a certain stage, they can transform into megalothymiotic. In other words, the isothymiotic people continue to demand recognition, but simultaneously, the megalothymiotic people limit it with the thymotic spirit to feel superior, different, and unique. In the context of religious identity politics, these two patterns are indeed seen in the steep journey of the political identity of local believers who are marginalized, as well as in identity politics directed at religion-based domination. To mediate this, the author argues that Indonesia needs to make inclusive pluralism a fundamental idea for strengthening national identity, in this case, the rejuvenation of Pancasila. The concrete thing that needs to be actualized is to map the curriculum of multicultural education, civic education, democracy

education, and similar approaches that are carried out in a structured and systematic manner from a young age to adulthood. This is expected to be able to build the character of the nation's children, who are then born with a high awareness of inclusive pluralism identity.

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