# IDENTITY POLITICS PRACTICE THROUGH DOMINANT DISCOURSE "SITIARJO VILLAGE AS A CHRISTIAN VILLAGE" IN LOCAL POLITICS DYNAMICS

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## Abstract

GKJW Christian figures are groundbreakers or founders of Sitiarjo Village, so that the GKJW Christians have a higher position compared to other religions followers. On this basis, many policies are considered religious bias. The purpose of this research is to explain the practice of identity politics in local politics in Sitiarjo Village. This study uses the identity politics concept. This research method is a qualitative with case study approach. Data analysis techniques used is pattern matching. The results of this study state that identity politics in the local politics dynamics in Sitiarjo Village seems to be getting stronger because anyone who wants to get involved in politics must consider this religious issue. Because in the view of the society, GKJW Christians must receive top priority to enter into structural positions in the village government, including becoming village head. This made the communalism issue, such as religious sentiment, even stronger in Sitiarjo Village.

*Keywords: Christian Village, Identity Politics, Local Politics Dynamics.*

## INTRODUCTION

Diversity in religion is Indonesia's wealth that must be safeguarded so as not to cause social disintegration or disharmony. However, the reality is not easy to realize social harmony in religious diversity in Indonesia. There are many symptoms that make social harmonization not run smoothly, one of which is due to differences that cannot be accepted by each party (Ridwan, 2015: 264).

The absence of good acceptance of the existing differences often causes each religious group to try to highlight the group and claim the truth unilaterally (Lestari, 2020: 33). The group that dominates tend to try to demonstrate the existence itself by weakening the other groups that are considered to have a lower position. On the other hand, the oppressed groups try to put up a resistance. This is what is known as identity politics.

Identity politics is basically a situation and way of politics that unites group because of a sense of injustice based on the same background, for example ethnicity, race, religion and gender (Adriananta dalam Ardiyanti, Anastasia, and Muhammad, 2019: 101). Then, the identity politics evolved into a political tool for a group such as ethnicity, race, culture, religion or the other for specific purposes,

such as an injunction or as a tool to show the group identity (Soenjoto, 2019: 189).

Identity politics as a political concept and movement whose focus is on difference as a major political category. After the failure of the grand narrative, the difference idea promised freedom, tolerance and free play, although then new threats emerged (Peralihan, 2019: 75). The threat from identity politics will be heavier for countries with a high level of multiculturalism, such as Indonesia. This is because identity politics is very developed in a multicultural and multiethnic country or society that is many differences (Peralihan, 2019: 68).

One example that can illustrate the development of the practice of identity politics is in Sitiarjo Village. Sitiarjo Village is a village located at the southern tip of Malang Regency. This village is known as a Christian Village because 6,657 or 90% of the population is Christian with the dominance of the Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan (GKJW). Furthermore, there are other religions, that is Islam with a number of followers of 740 people (10%) (Sitiarjo Village Profile Data, 2019).

GKJW Christians are quite dominant in various fields in Sitiarjo Village because GKJW Christian figures are the ones who are the groundbreakers or founders of Sitiarjo Village. This is because Christian expansion in East Java tends to use the groundbreak approach to reduce tensions with adherents of other religions, such as Islam, which dominates many areas in East Java (Menchik, 2016). In fact, the tension did not arise with the presence of GKJW Christians because they created their own territory by carrying out groundbreak. However, this tension arise when Sitiarjo Village was developed and dominated by the GKJW Christians, and then Islam came and tried to develop its existence in Sitiarjo Village.

The arrival of Islam for the first time in Sitiarjo Village occurred around the 1980s through trade and marriage. This caused turmoil and rejection so that many policies were deemed to be religious bias, one of which was in the political field, that is the village head and government structure had to be filled by GKJW Christians. They assume that as a Christian Village it must be led by Christian.

This is still true today, but has changed slightly because of the resistance and struggle of Muslims. This change is that there are two Muslim figures who are able to occupy positions in the village government structure, that is Modin Islam and Head of Krajan Hamlet. However, the two positions that were successfully held by Muslim citizens were still considered not representative and were still considered as limiting movements of

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Muslims in politics.

For this reason, the purpose of this journal is to analyze the practice of identity politics, both those carried out by the GKJW Christians to maintain their existence and those carried out by Muslims as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse "Sitiarjo Village as a Christian Village" especially in the local political field. This research is expected to provide recommendations in the form of mapping conflicts in the future, especially in the political field in Sitiarjo Village and other areas with similar case.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity politics according to Lukmantoro in Nasrudin and Ahmad (2018: 36) is politics to prioritize the interests of members of a group because they have the same identity or characteristics, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. Identity politics is another formulation of difference politics. Identity politics is a political act with efforts to channel aspirations to influence policy, control over the distribution of values that are considered valuable until the most fundamental demands, that is self-determination on the basis of primordiality. In the field of religion, identity politics is reflected in various efforts to include religious values in the policy-making process, such as trying to make an area identical to a certain religion.

Identity politics is the provision of very clear lines to determine who will be included and who will be rejected. The determination line will appear irreversible. Therefore, the status both as a member and non-member will appear to be permanent. Meanwhile, scientists who are involved in other discourses of identity politics have tried to reinterpret it in a very simple and more operational logic. For example, Agnes Heller, who has defined identity politics as a political movement whose focus is on a difference as a major political category (Nasrudin, 2018: 37). Agnes Heller describes the identity politics as politics, which is focused on a distinction, where the main category is the promise of freedom, tolerance and free play, even though in the end it will lead to patterns of intolerance, violence and conflict (Nasrudin, 2018: 37).

Identity politics is basically a situation and way of politics that unites groups because of a sense of injustice and dissatisfaction based on the same background groups, for example ethnicity, race, religion and gender (Adriananta dalam Ardiyanti, Anastasia, and Muhammad, 2019: 101). Then, identity politics develops into a political tool for a group such as ethnicity, race, culture, religion or others for certain purposes, for example as a form of resistance or as a tool to show the identity of a group (Soenjoto,

2019: 189).

Identity politics as a political concept and movement whose focus is on difference as a major political category. After the failure of the grand narrative, the idea of difference promised freedom, tolerance and free play, although then new threats emerged (Peralihan, 2019: 75). The threat from identity politics will be heavier for countries with a high level of multiculturalism, such as Indonesia. This is because identity politics is very fertile in situations of multicultural and multiethnic states or societies that are many differences (Peralihan, 2019: 68).

Identity politics is rooted in stereotypes embedded in a primordial perspective. Following concept of polity by Aristoteles, primordialism means "fighting outward and consolidation inward". Therefore, identity politics is always colored by conflicts both frontal and dialectical. Identity politics always exists in the area of tension between superiority and inferiority (Castells, 2003: 7). In the discourse of pluralism, when democratization is rolled out and gets strong support from the concept of multiculturalism, identity politics seems to find its strength, where the existence of minorities changes from being ignored to being questioned as well as being fought for either by assimilation or acculturation that is systemic (Soenjoto, 2019: 197-198). The struggle for identity politics will achieve its goals when the stereotype that is attached can be aligned with the existence of groups with other identities and obtain equal rights in the social, cultural and political sphere.

In the relation between identity politics and religion in the political field, there are two main factors that make religion attractive and salient to be used and influential in the political process. First, when religion becomes a factor at stake. There is a need to defend the identity of a group. Second, when the political process takes place competitively (Nasrudin and Ahmad, 2018: 37). This means that the political process causes identity groups to face each other. General election, is a political process in which various factors such as identity are at stake. so it depends on the actors involved in managing issues such as religion, which is at stake.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data source of this research, the first is the primary data source which is obtained directly from the research informants. Furthermore, the second data source is secondary data obtained from websites, journals, libraries, and Sitiarjo

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Village profile data. Data collection techniques were carried out by observation, interviewi, and study documentation. The informants in this study were selected through the snowball technique. The informants of this study included the Head of Sitiarjo Village, GKJW Christian Figures, Modin Islam, and the Head of Krajan Hamlet. The informants were chosen because they were considered to know the problems raised in this study. The data analysis technique was done by matching patterns. While the data validity technique was done by sources and methods triangulation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Groundbreak of Sitiarjo Village

Sitiarjo Village was founded in 1985 when Kyai Ngastowo and his relatives started doing grounbreak or clearing Panguluran forest. At first glance, the name of Kyai Ngastowo looks like an Islamic name, but in fact, Kyai Ngastowo is one of the Christian figures of GKJW. Then, there was also Pastor Louwerier who asked for permission to carry out slashing mats or open land to the Dutch East Indies government in the Palung Lor area. This area in Palung Lor was later called Pondhok Dhulang. 15 families who carried out groundbreak of pondok dulang settled in this area while waiting for the permit to be issued. On February 11, 1897, an official permit issued with the lion logo from the Dutch East Indies government with an issue date of June 25, 1895 (Certificate of the Directorate General of Christian Community Development, Ministry of Religion No.F/Rep/38/3685/79, dated 10 October 1979). In 1904, Sitiarjo established the village version. In 1906, Sitiarjo established the GKJW version with all the rules that were religion bias. In 1918, the construction of the oldest and largest GKJW main church was carried out in Sitiarjo Village (Sitiarjo Village Profile Data, 2019: 8-9).

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that Sitiarjo Village was born from groundbreak that carried out by GKJW Christian figures. At the beginning of the establishment of Sitiarjo Village, many policies were religion bias. Some of the policies with religion bias include (1) Only GKJW Christians can live and settle in Sitiarjo Village. If people of other religions want to settle in Sitiarjo Village, their religion in national identity card must be Christian. For this reason, many Muslims change their religion in national identity card to Christian, regardless of whether they convert of religion or not. (2) Only GKJW Christians may own land in Sitiarjo Village. (3) Only GKJW Christians may hold positions in the village government structure, including becoming a village head.

### Religion Bias Policy and the Emergence of Identity Politics

Of the three bias policies, only policy in the political sector are still being sustained until now, although it has undergone several changes. The policy referred to is that only GKJW Christians may occupy positions in the village government structure, including becoming a village head. Some of the changes that have occurred that is the current, two Muslim figures who have successfully entered the village government structure by serving as Modin of Islam and Head of Center Krajan Hamlet. This change occurred because Islam began to develop in Sitiarjo Village, where the development of Islam could not be avoided as a result of the heterogeneity of society in Indonesia.

However, several things that still need to be underlined to mark the existence of identity politics that occurred in Sitiarjo Village are: (1) only GKJW Christians have succeeded in serving as village head from the time of Sitiarjo Village was established until today. (2) Non-Christian communities, in this case Islam, are very limited in the village government structure, it is evident that there are only two Muslim citizens who succeeded in serving in the village government structure. (3) there is resistance from the Muslim society against policy that are religion bias.

Identity politics according to Lukmantoro in Nasrudin and Ahmad (2018: 36) is politics to prioritize the interests of members of a group because they have the same identity or characteristics, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. In this case, there is a similarity in religious matter, where the GKJW Christians, who in fact are the founder of Sitiarjo Village, feel that they have superior power compared to the Muslims. For this reason, the GKJW Christians continue to strive to perpetuate they power and show they identity in Sitiarjo Village, one of which is by limiting the Islamic movement in the political field in Sitiarjo Village. What the GKJW Christians have done is actually a development of identity politics which has become a political tool to certain purpose, for example as a tool to show the identity and existence of a group (Soenjoto, 2019: 189).

### The Practice of Identity Politics in Village Head Election

The identity politics in Sitiarjo Village seems to be getting stronger because anyone who wants to enter the politics by holding the position of village head through direct election must consider this religion issue. Because in the view of

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the society, GKJW Christians must receive top priority to become village head. As a Christian village, Sitiarjo Village should be led by Christian figures. This has made issue of communalism such as religious sentiment become stronger. This is because the candidates for village head who are advanced or who are nominated in every village head election in Sitiarjo Village may not be people who are seen primarily by their abilities, but from which identity they come from. That is why people who have the opportunity to become village head in Sitiarjo Village are informal leaders from the GKJW Christian who have many followers and have "primordial ties" with the village head. According to Lay in (Lefaan, Heru, dan Mudiono, 2012: 10), this can lead to "religious consolidation", which can be a source of conflict.

This understanding has led to the position of village head from the beginning of Sitiarjo Village until now it continues to be held by Christians. This happened because religion identity became important in the general election process in Sitiarjo Village. GKJW Christians certainly have a greater chance than Muslims, considering that Sitiarjo Village is dominated by GKJW Christians. This cannot be separated from the efforts made by the GKJW Christians to continue to maintain they existence. In the relation between identity politics and religion in the political field, there are two main factors that make religion attractive and salient to be used and influential in the political process. First, when religion is a factor at stake. There is a need to defend the identity of a group. Second, when the political process takes place competitively (Nasrudin and Ahmad, 2018: 37).

The effort made by the GKJW Christians to perpetuate they power by taking over as village head are not without reason. With the strong influence of GKJW Christians on the village government structure, it is possible to limit the spread of Islam in Sitiarjo Village. This is because all access related to administration, building permits for schools and places of worship, licensing activities such as public recitations, religious celebration are very dependent on permit issued by the village government. If the village allows, then everything will run smoothly. On the other hand, if the village blocks or complicates the licensing process, everything will become complicated and convoluted.

The limitation of the Islamic movement in Sitiarjo Village is inseparable from the goal of the GKJW Christians to perpetuate the image of Sitiarjo Village as a Christian Village. This is because, in the religious field, identity politics is reflected in various attempts to include religious values in the policy-making process, such as trying to make an area identical to a

certain religion.

## Stereotypes and Identity Politics

Identity politics is also inseparable from existing stereotypes. Identity politics is rooted on stereotypes that have been embedded with using a primordial perspective. Where in this case, the GKJW Christians have indirectly labeled themselves as superiority and the Muslims as inferiority. Rooted from this stereotype, the GKJW Christians trie to show and maintain they existence by limiting the movement of the Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims who are aware of their weak and oppressed position try to fight back with the hope of being able to equalize their position or even surpass the GKJW Christians position. This is what makes conflict inevitable in the practice of identity politics.

Following polity concept by Aristoteles, primordialism means "fighting outward and consolidation inward". Therefore, identity politics is always characterized by conflicts that are frontal or dialectic. Identity politics always exist in the area of tension between superiority and inferiority (Castells, 2003: 7). In the discourse of pluralism, when democratization is rolled out and gets strong support from the concept of multiculturalism, identity politics seems to find its strength, where the existence of minorities changes

from being ignored to being questioned as well as being fought for either by assimilation or acculturation which is systemic (Soenjoto, 2019: 197-198). The struggle of identity politics will reach its purpose when the stereotype that is attached can be aligned with the existence of groups with other identities and get equal rights in the social, cultural and political field.

Similarly stereotype attached to Muslims as a group of inferiority. On the basis of this stereotype, the existence of a Muslims that initially remained silent with their marginalized position finally began to dare to fight back in an effort to show their existence or identity. The resistance in the political field began in 2001 when one of the Muslims finally succeeded in becoming Islam Modin. Since 2001, it means that in Sitiarjo Village there are two Modins, that is Christian Modin and Islam Modin. This can be said to be a good thing because of in other places where are dominated by Christians also have an average of only one Modin from Christian.

## Identity Politics Practices by Muslim

The entry of a Muslim figure into the village government structure by becoming Islamic Modin was inseparable from the resistance carried out by the Islamic society. The Islamic society feels that when there is only one Modin from Christian, the

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management of the death of Muslims is not optimal. This is because the Christian Modin is considered to have a lack of understanding of the management implementation of death in Islam. Starting from that, the Muslims finally ventured to voice so that one Modin from Islam was added. After going through several difficult processes, finally the voice from Muslims were heard and made the addition of one Modin from Islam.

Then, when the first Islamic Modin in Sitiarjo Village died, he was replaced by his assistant who was also a Muslim. This made the position of Muslim figure who has successfully entered the village government structure still being maintained. And since there was a Muslim who entered the village government structure by becoming Modin, the Islamic movement has become more open. Starting there are several mosques that have been successfully built and there are also starting an Islamic-based kindergarten in Sitiarjo Village.

Until now, the position of Modin in Sitiarjo Village is still filled by two person, that is representatives of Islam and Christianity. Then in 2012, there was one more Muslim figure who was able to enter the village government structure, with the position of Hamlet Head of Center Krajan. The position of Hamlet Head of Center Krajan which was successfully held by one of the Muslim resulted from the enthusiasm of the Muslim

society who encouraged one of his leaders to take the test to become a hamlet head. This is based on the condition that in Center Krajan Hamlet, there are many Muslim residents. Although the residents of Center Krajan Hamlet are still dominated by Christians, at least the largest number of Muslims are in Center Krajan Hamlet. So, it is time for the Center Krajan Hamlet to be led by Muslim.

The encouragement of Muslim society toward one of its leaders to become the Head of Center Krajan Hamlet also cannot be separated from the concept of identity politics. Identity politics basically has a specific purpose, for example as a form of struggle or a tool to show the group identity (Soenjoto, 2019: 189). Where as a group that has an inferiority position, Islamic group unite and struggle to improve their position in society. One of the ways that is done is to make one of the figures as the Head of Center Krajan Hamlet. This is expected to reduce policies that are religion bias and increase the bargaining position of Islamic group in society.

The success of Muslim figure to become Head of Center Krajan Hamlet was not only due to the social and cultural capital he had, but also with the support of the Muslim society in Sitiarjo VillageThe amount and relative weight of capital

owned by a person are in fact able to determine his position in society (Boudieu in Ritzer and Goodman, 2010: 581). Cultural capital has an important role because to become the Head of Center Krajan Hamlet, there is a test being carried out by the government. The tests carried out consisted of written test, oral test, and interview. Even though at that time, there were three candidates running for the head of Center Krajan Hamlet, where the other two were Christian figures. However, in reality, the Islamic figure got the highest points in the tests carried out. So that, the Islamic figure was elected as the Head of the Center Krajan Hamlet.

At present, with the presence of two representatives of Muslims in the village government structure, the position of Islam is starting to be given a place. Evidently, in 2013, Muslims began to be given place in village thanksgiving event in the form of general recitation. This happened after two Muslim figures who can enter in the village government structure voiced their voice, so that, Islamic group was also given a place in the village thanksgiving event. This opinion is based on the fact that as a village inhabited not only by Christians, so other society from different religion should also be given a place, including in village thanksgiving event. They think that this village belongs together so it should be prayed together, but it's just a different way of praying for it. For this reason, the day before the village thanksgiving event was held, during the day, the Islamic group was given a place to do general recitation at the village hall, and then at night, Christian group was given a place to pray at the village hall. Then, the next day when the village thanksgiving was also celebrated together.

Starting to increase the bargaining position of Islamic group in Sitiarjo Village, especially in the political field, is one of the expected goals. Through the discourse of identity politics, Muslims are increasingly aware of their position and are trying to unite to fight for common goals. Even though until now, the position of Islamic society in the political field has not been able to surpass Christian society, at least there has been a change to be better. These changes are hoped to improve and make the position of Islamic society in politics at least equal to Christian society.

## CONCLUSION

In the discourse of pluralism, when democratization is rolled out and gets strong support from the concept of multiculturalism, identity politics seems to find its strength, where the existence of minorities changes from being ignored to

being questioned as well as being fought for. The same with identity politics carried out by Muslims. Initially, the Muslims were silent to see the movement of the GKJW Christians in maintaining their existence in the political field. However, with the growing awareness, eventually the spirit to struggle to show their identity began to exist. In the political field, there are two Muslim figures who successfully entered in the village government structure with the positions of Islamic Modin and Head of Center Krajan Hamlet. Whereas previously no single figure of Muslims who successfully entered in the government structure of Sitiarjo village. However, as for the position of village head, no one Muslim figure has succeeded to hold it. Because the image of Sitiarjo Village as a Christian Village is still strong and difficult to tear down. So, in essence, the struggle of identity politics carried out by Muslims has not been able to find its place because the stereotypes attached to Muslims cannot be aligned with the existence of the GKJW Christians. In addition, Muslims have not been able to obtain the same rights in the political field, such as the opportunity to become village head. However, at least the struggle of identity politics carried out by Muslims was able to improve the bargaining position of Muslims in social life in Sitiarjo Village.

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