

Who_Is_to_Blame,_the_Victims_ or_the_Perpetrators_iep.pdf

by

Submission date: 23-Jun-2020 09:39PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 1348591215

File name: Who_Is_to_Blame,_the_Victims_or_the_Perpetrators_iep.pdf (98.83K)

Word count: 7778

Character count: 41845

7 Who Is to Blame, the Victims or the Perpetrators? A Study to Understand a Series of Violence Targeting the Accused Heretic Group Ahmadiyya

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Conducted in Indonesia, this study analyzes how a religious group accused of being heretical ended up receiving threats and a number of violent reactions, a situation in which the victims were considered to have caused the violence. The study presented here focused on this case of the Ahmadiyya, a minority Muslim group in Indonesia that are the most frequently reported as being victims of violence. In total, 309 Sunni Muslims participated in filling out open-ended questions, and 10 Sunni Muslims (all male) participated in interviews discussing the Ahmadiyya and interreligious groups. We found that a substantial number of majority Sunni Muslims think that the values of the Ahmadiyya group are incompatible with common, mainstream Muslim values. As a consequence, their existence is considered a threat and a disruption to the Muslim community. Therefore, violence is justified if the group insists upon continuing their religious activities. In the eyes of these Sunni Muslims, Ahmadiyya members undermine the coherence within the Muslim community, and occurrence of violence against Ahmadiyya members is thus thought to be the victim's own fault.

Keywords: social exclusions, victim blaming, heretic group, social identity, intragroup relations

Groups that are accused of being heretics are prone to receiving threats and acts of violence (Putra, Mashuri, & Zaduqisti, 2015; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2011). In Indonesia, members of the Ahmadiyya, a minority Islamic group, are most frequently reported as being victims of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Up to now, many Ahmadiyya members have been exiled from their hometown, forcing them to live in shelters (Burhani, 2014). Surprisingly, on February 11, 2011, an Islamic bulletin, Al-Islam, stated that the Ahmadiyya group is to blame itself for becoming a target of violence. According to Al-Islam, Ahmadiyya's ideology or beliefs are the causes for the violence that occurred. The study presented here was conducted to understand more deeply what is behind the victim blaming of the Ahmadiyya group.

Victim Blaming: Individual and Social Perspectives

A tendency to blame the victim instead of the perpetrator is not a new phenomenon. There are several theoretical explanations for this phenomenon. One line of explanation assumes that people usually believe that the world is a just place (Hafer, 2001; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). According to this "just world" perspective, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people; thus, the victims are blamed, because they supposedly only got what they deserved. A rape victim, for example, may be blamed because she may have been wearing a seductive or provocative dress. Therefore, such misfortune is believed to be the victim's fault (e.g., Sebbly & Johnston, 2012). With regard to intergroup blaming, victims who are members of an outgroup are blamed because that group is thought to have done wrong things.

To a member of a "mainstream" religious group, and in particular to radical or extremist members of the group, heretics may appear to be "enemies within" (Finlay, 2007, p. 330): Their defection from the group norms and values held by the mainstream group not only is despicable in itself but also may even endanger the group more than an external enemy could. In particular, whenever religious norms and values are considered sacred and beyond question, any deviance from the prevailing group norms constitutes a threat to the religious group as a whole—at least in the eyes of those who endorse a fundamentalistic interpretation of their religion (cf. Herriot, 2007). This is because the heretics' supposedly "aberrant" behavior could—in the radical group members' perception—"spread over" to other members of the ingroup "like a disease" (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). In view of the fact that religious groups are defined by the beliefs, values, and

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We would like to thank Reisa S. Arimbi and Azzahra Aulia for their contribution as independent coders in this project.

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practices they share, they only exist “as long as there are members willing to engage in the labor of identity construction and identity confirmation” (Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009, p. 369). Hence, religious fundamentalists may regard violent action against such “deviants” as not only justified but also necessary to prevent further evil (cf. Finlay, 2007).

Likewise, focusing on societal states and influenced by a social identity perspective, a study conducted by Putra et al. (2015) showed that the reason why Ahmadiyya members are blamed is because the Sunni Muslim participants think that Ahmadiyya has undermined Islamic values and conspired to abolish Islam. From a social identity perspective (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a person is seen as part of a reflexive group in which the members of the group “know their affiliation and have criteria available to decide who else is also a member” (Wagner, 1995, p. 127). This group identity brings along with it values and emotional attachment between the group members (Tajfel, 1982). Group membership may also imply certain ways of thinking and living.

Another possible explanation for the derogation of members of the Ahmadiyya group is based upon an attribution perspective, that is, that people’s judgment is influenced by how people attach meaning to others’ behavior in a particular event (i.e., by their attributions). It is important to note that there are two general attribution types, internal and external attribution. In internal attribution, the causal explanation of an event is based upon internal characteristics (e.g., personality) of the victim. On the other hand, the causal explanation of external attribution is related to outside forces, such as the environment or situational factors. A victim of domestic violence, for instance, will often be blamed by the perpetrator(s) because of the victim’s personality, such as an offensive personality (i.e., internal attribution). However, we assume that this kind of perspective can only be used to explain interpersonal relations but not intergroup relations. In the case of blaming Ahmadiyya members, people are most often blamed because they are members of the Ahmadiyya group rather than because of their personality or internal factors. Such perceptions of “bad personalities” can only emerge after a person is known to be part of the negative outgroup (Putra, Holtz, Pitaloka, Kronberger, & Arbiyah, 2017).

A study conducted by Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006) revealed that violence perpetrated against a group is perceived as justified and exempted from sanctions only when the group is dehumanized. Ingroup members may feel that such violent action is wrong, but it still cannot be deemed bad if the victim of the violence is categorized as not fully human. Characterizing a victim as part of a derogated group (i.e., dehumanization as less human, inhuman) or a threatening group can help ingroup members to defend such wrongdoing perpetrated by their own group.

In contrast to Castano and Giner-Sorolla’s (2006) findings, a study conducted by Bilali, Tropp, and Dasgupta (2012) demonstrated that whenever ingroup members believe that the outgroup sparked an intergroup conflict, ingroup members tended to feel less responsible for past acts of mass violence that were committed by members of their group. This finding can shed light on the question as to why the Turkish government (Study 1) does not admit past wrongdoings toward the Armenian people: This is because they believe that the Armenians themselves were responsible for the occurrence of intergroup conflict.

A large group with many members usually has subgroups or even subsubgroups (Putra et al., 2015). Groups are considered part of a superordinate group or a commingroup as long as their members share core values or goals (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2010; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). Subgroups that do not share these values and goals will eventually be demonized, scolded, or excluded by the majority members; the nonconforming subgroup is then labeled as deviant or heretic. In the case of Islamic groups, Ahmadiyya is one group that is frequently scolded by majority Sunni followers. Recognizing the multiple factors of victim blaming, this study explores how members of the Ahmadiyya group are blamed. We also analyze whether other reasons for blaming a victimized group can be found in the case of the Ahmadiyya.

Ahmadiyya in Indonesia: The Past and the Present

Throughout the world, Ahmadiyya is a minority group within Islam that has frequently been the victim of violence. Initially, Ahmadiyya’s teaching was spread around 1889 in Qadian, a town located in the area between Pakistan and India, which became the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya movement. In the partition of Pakistan-India in 1947, the headquarters was moved to Lahore and in 1948 to Rabwah, Pakistan. However, because of prosecution by the Sunni majority and prohibition of spreading Ahmadiyya teaching by the Pakistan government in 1984, the Ahmadiyya headquarters was moved to London.

Many Muslims perceive severe differences between Ahmadiyya’s teachings and the teachings of Sunni Islam. First, their founder Mirza Gulam Ahmad is believed by the Ahmadi (the adherents of Ahmadiyya) to be the Messiah and a prophet, although he did not bring a new religion or a new holy book. This belief is a major difference from the two biggest denominations of Islam, Shia and Sunni, where Muhammad is considered the last or the end prophet. Second, an Ahmadi can only engage in congregational prayer in his or her own community and with an Ahmadi imam (leader). On the other hand, other Muslims can pray congregationally anywhere, even when the imam is not from the same community. Third, even though Ahmadi also accept the Quran as their holy book, their interpretation of it is different from that of Sunni and Shia Muslims. Ahmadiyya does not accept Quran interpretations from non-Ahmadi, while other Muslim communities are comparatively open to interpretations that have been developed by other congregations (Hanafi, 2011). Mainly because of these three points, Ahmadiyya’s existence has triggered fierce debates within majority Sunni Muslim groups. The debate centers on the question of whether Ahmadiyya is still part of Islam or not. These issues have also even been covered by national TV stations in Indonesia.

Persecution of Ahmadiyya members has become more intense since the early 2000s. However, there have been criticisms of Ahmadiyya ever since the beginning of its arrival in Indonesia in the late 1920s. For example, in 1932, Muhammadiyah, one of the two biggest Sunni Muslim groups in Indonesia, issued a fatwa to forbid their followers from following Ahmadiyya’s teachings (Aldaus, 2007, in Farkhan, 2012). Long after that, in 1980, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya as a heretical, deviant sect (Prodjokusumo, 1994, in Farkhan, 2012).

Between 2000 and 2015, there were several severe acts of persecution and rejection against Ahmadiyya. For example, in Selog, East Lombok, in September 2002, Ahmadiyya members experienced physical abuse. In 2005, an attack happened in Parung, Bogor (Yuswanto & Afifi, 2007, in Farkhan, 2012). In 2006, Ahmadi in Ketapang, West Nusa Tenggara province, were exiled and still live in shelters up to now. In 2011, a violent attack occurred in Cikeusik, Pandeglang, Banten, resulting in the death of three people. In Manis Lor village, Kuningan, attacks occurred in 2002, 2007, and 2010 (Farkhan, 2012). In 2015, an Ahmadiyya mosque in Tebet, Jakarta, was sealed after quarrels between Ahmadi and other Muslims (Murti, 2015).

Currently, Ahmadiyya members have been banned, even by the government, from doing certain religious activities, such as giving sermons outside of their group or holding mass recitation openly (Mahmuddin, 2008, in Farkhan, 2012). Religious activities can only be conducted inside their own domain to avoid social turmoil. As a consequence, Ahmadiyya members have difficulty getting an e-KTP (electronic identity card) because they are not recognized as legitimate.

Cases of Heretic Groups in Indonesia

Apart from Ahmadiyya, there are also other religious groups in Indonesia that are labeled as heretics. This label is mostly given by the majority Sunni Muslims. Some of the groups are, for example, Shia Muslims, Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar), Agama Djawa Sunda (ADS), Himpunan Penghayat Kepercayaan (HPK) Masade, and Aji Saka.

According to those who are opposed to Shia, Shia is labeled as heretical because some of their beliefs are considered different from those of the Sunnis. The biggest difference is in the recognition given to Khalifa Abu Bakar, Umar, and Usman. Whereas the Shias only acknowledge Khalifa Ali bin Abi Thalib, the Sunnis acknowledge all four. For an example of outgroup treatment, persecution toward the Shia in Sampang in 2012 caused 37 damaged houses (of Shia members), one death, and dozens of injured people. This conflict ended with the Shia community relocating to Sidoarjo, giving in to the demands of the Sunnis (Mawuntyas, 2012; Rufaedah & Hanifah, 2015).

The Indonesian government also recently banned Gafatar, an organization that was regarded as a deviant sect. Gafatar was founded by Ahmad Mushadeq, a member of Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), in 1987. He established an organization called Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah in 2000 after discord between him and other NII members. The organization had around 8,000 followers from various cities in Indonesia. In 2007, it was declared heretical and banned by MUI. The reasons given were that they did not make mandatory the five pillars of Islam, and their *Shahada* (declaration of faith) was different.

In 2009, Al-Qiyadah changed its name to Komunitas Millah Abraham (Komar). The tenets were the same as Al-Qiyadah. Three years afterward, Gafatar was established, with 14 provincial-level managing organizations (Evan, 2016). Gafatar continued to grow but was banned from doing any activities by MUI and the government. MUI issued a fatwa on February 3, 2016, which declared Gafatar as deviant and heretical. On March 3, 2016, the government issued a joint decree (Surat Keputusan Bersama/SKB) from three ministries calling for order and containing a warning to stop

religious activities that deviate from the principal teachings of Islam. Because of the fatwa and SKB, former Gafatar members could not socialize or do any of their activities freely. They also could not give out any information about Gafatar for fear of being accused of spreading their teachings, as was stated in the SKB.

Another example is the cult of Kyai Madrais or ADS in Cigugur-Kuningan, West Java, that had existed since before Indonesia's independence. This group was used as a political tool by the Dutch colonial government, because it was rejected by most *santris* (students of Islamic boarding schools). The Kyai Madrais group was considered deviant because their teachings were different from those of the majority Sunni Islam. For example, they did not require circumcision and they buried bodies in coffins. In 1964, this group was officially dissolved by the government due to pressure from the people of Kuningan and the *santris* (Nuh, 2011). Most Madrais followers then chose Catholic as their official religion. Even though their beliefs were closer to Islam, the strong hate that they had experienced made them unwilling to choose Islam. There were at least 1770 Madrais followers who converted to Catholic, including Pangeran Tejabuana, their leader at that time. In 1981, the second generation of the Kyai Madrais founder, Pangeran Djatikusuma, founded Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang (PACKU). But that group was again dissolved the following year because it was considered the same as Kyai Madrais. Because of this obstacle, the leader made PACKU a traditional custom group, not an organization. He named it Adat Karuhun Urang, and it still exists today (Rosidi, 2011).

Another cult group was Masade in Lenganeng Village, Sangihe, North Sulawesi. This group was close to Islam, but in 1990, it was declared un-Islamic by MUI and the Muslims outside the Lenganeng Village. After that labeling, Kantor urusan agama (office of religious affairs) refused to perform any religious marriage ceremony for Masade followers. Since then, the followers have left behind the term "Islam Kaum Tua" and have changed their name to HPK Masade (Rosidi, 2011).

Aji Saka group in Rancagong, Legok, Tangerang, Banten, is another group that was considered deviant. This group has existed in Legok since 1984. In 2015, they were disturbed when their leaders were summoned by the village officials to explain their beliefs. The local leader then declared a ban on Aji Saka's activities because they were considered deviant. This matter has been handled by Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia (National commission for human rights; Komnas HAM), but Aji Saka members still cannot conduct their activities as freely as previously, and their good name has not been restored (Komnas HAM, 2015).

The Present Study

The present study was conducted in Indonesia, as there has been an increasing tendency of violence and social exclusion by the majority Sunni Muslims toward minority religious groups (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In particular, we recruited participants in and around Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. We focused the study of victim blaming on Ahmadiyya, the group that has been the most frequently reported as a victim of violence. By understanding the reasons why Ahmadiyya is blamed, we hope that this study can help answer why groups accused of being heretical are socially excluded and can help find ways to resolve cases of victim blaming.

Method

Data Collection and Procedure

We collected qualitative data from three different field research projects. Two of them included open-ended questions, which were parts of a questionnaire in an interreligious study. We named these data as Data 1 and Data 2. Another set of qualitative data was collected from interviews solely conducted for this study. We named this set Interview Data. Quotes from interviewees' statements, Data 1, and Data 2 are marked with "M" for males and "F" for females (only from Data 1 and Data 2), followed by their age.

The open-ended questions and interview sections were presented in the Indonesian language, and participants with a clear religious identification of Sunni Muslim were invited to participate. Before starting, participants were asked to fill in an informed consent form to confirm their agreement to voluntarily participate in this research. Upon finishing, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Data 1. In total, 208 Sunni Muslims (males = 125; females = 83; $M_{age} = 23.65$, $SD = 7.33$, minimum = 16, maximum = 58) participated in the study and responded to three questions regarding Ahmadiyya. First, participants were asked to rate which group, if conflict happened between (Sunni) Muslims-Ahmadis or Muslims-Christians, would potentially face a worse situation compared to the other "conflicting" group (Ahmadiyya or Christians). Subsequently, they were asked to write their reasons. Next, the participants were asked to describe their attitudes toward the Ahmadiyya group and Christians in general.

Data 2. In total, 101 Sunni Muslims (males = 32; females = 69; $M_{age} = 23.26$, $SD = 8.84$, minimum = 17, maximum = 53) participated in the study and responded to two questions about Ahmadiyya. First, participants were asked to respond to a statement that the Ahmadiyya group itself is the cause of the problems it faces. After that, they were asked to explain the reasons of their response.

Interview data. Ten males participated in the interviews, with age ranging from 19 to 45 years ($M = 26.10$, $SD = 7.08$). We decided to use an all-male sample for several reasons. First, in the

Muslim world, males tend to be dominant and hold authority in interpreting how Muslims are (Al-Munajjid, 2001). Second, females, as a wife and/or a daughter, are supposed to follow the leaders; a wife must obey her husband (Islamweb.net, 2013). Whereas we only interviewed male participants, we already had information on women's perception of Ahmadiyya from Data 1 and Data 2.

In the interviews, interviewees were asked about interreligious groups: how Muslims should see other groups, what they think about the Ahmadiyya group and what Ahmadiyya members think about majority Sunni Muslims, what they supposedly think about Christians, and what Christians supposedly think about Muslims (i.e., Sunni Muslims). In the present study, we will only report the data concerning Ahmadiyya.

Analysis

This study used thematic content analysis in order to identify common themes in the texts provided for analysis. The text data were identified, coded, categorized into themes, and translated (see Table 1). Two independent raters coded messages/statements that referred to the themes we developed (see Hallgren, 2012). The results of interrater reliabilities (Cohen's kappa) ranged from $\kappa = 0.42$ (similar faith) to $\kappa = 1.0$ (smart). We decided to exclude some other themes because of their lack of reliability (e.g., exclusive, undermining Islam, and tolerant group). In the conditions where respondents gave multiple statements, we used multiple response analysis. There were two general themes that were identified as common features: (1) the enemy from within is more dangerous, and (2) because victim groups are troubling, they need to be blamed. In the following, we present the results for these two general themes.

Results

The Enemy From Within Is More Dangerous

From Data 1, Muslim participants ($N = 208$) perceived that if conflict happens between (Sunni) Muslims-Ahmadiyya or

Table 1
Themes, Reliability Kappa, and Extracts

Themes	κ	Agreement (%)	Excerpt
Smart	1	100.00	It is a smart group (F20)
Hypocritical	.92	99.86	They have claimed to be the most righteous (M40)
A strong and solid group	.90	99.56	They have strong solidarity, network, commitment, and bond (F25)
No idea of its teaching	.74	98.36	I don't know much about Ahmadiyya's teaching (F21)
Cannot exist/banned group	.72	97.41	Ahmadiyya must be banned because they are not recognized by the state as a religion (M30)
Heretic/deviant/tainted	.71	94.74	Deviating from the teachings of Islam which has been prescribed in the Quran and Hadith (M19)
Accepted	.61	94.35	Ahmadiyya is one of the religious groups that exist in Indonesia. They can grow here as Indonesia is a democratic country (F22)
Victim/marginalized	.59	96.77	The Ahmadis have frequently become victims of violence, excluded from their hometown, lost their families, etc (F23)
Good/nice	.58	98.58	Ahmadiyya in Indonesia is considered good, they manage the followers in a good way (M22)
Troubling/threatening	.55	96.00	I feel the existence of Ahmadiyya is troubling to religious harmony in Indonesia (M26)
Unthreatening	.54	99.02	So far, I don't see any threat from them (F21)
Not/different from Islam	.53	92.63	Ahmadiyya is not Islam. If they want to exist, it is better for them to not relate their teachings with Islam (M30)
Similar faith	.43	92.98	Our worshipping is similar, and our God is the same (M19)

Muslims-Christians, the worst resulting conditions would potentially be borne by Ahmadiyya ($f = 83.7\%$) members instead of Christians ($f = 16.3\%$). This would be because Ahmadiyya ($N = 150$) were considered heretic/deviant ($f = 72.0\%$), different from Islam ($f = 25.3\%$), and troubling or a threat to Muslim society ($f = 16.0\%$).

When separately discussing Ahmadiyya ($N = 150$) and Christians ($N = 72$)¹ (see Table 2), Christians were mentioned more positively (good/nice group = 50.0%) than Ahmadiyya (good/nice = 3.3%). Ahmadiyya were the most frequently perceived in relation to the negative themes such as heretic/deviant ($f = 45.3\%$), cannot exist/banned ($f = 22.7\%$) different from Islam ($f = 13.3\%$), and troubling/a threat ($f = 12.7\%$).

Note in particular an attribute like heretic/deviant. From participants' comments, it seems that one of the reasons why they are attributed as a heretical group is because they deviate from Islamic teaching principles:

[Indonesia]

Umat Ahmadiyah di Indonesia dipandang sebagai umat yang sesat, umat yang lebih memilih gelap daripada terang. Islam itu satu, mengacu pada al-quran dan ajaran-ajaran dari Nabi Muhammad. Mereka mengaku Islam yang benar tetapi mereka tidak mengamalkan al-quran dan syariat-syariat agama Islam. hidup agar selamat, tetapi berpegang teguh pada keimanan dan berpedoman kepada al-Quran, bukan menciptakan segolongan "Islam" yang baru bagi segolongan umat. (F16)

[English]

Ahmadiyya members in Indonesia are seen as a group of deviants, a group that chooses dark over light. Islam is one, referring to Al Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. They claim to be the true Islam but they do not practice the Quran and the sharia. To be saved, keep holding on to the faith and be guided by Quran, instead of creating a new kind of "Islam" for a certain group. (F16)

There are norms, values, and goals in a group to be followed by the members. For a group to be able to exist over ages, aspects of norms and values are essentialized (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Wagner et al., 2009). Thus, when a novel norm is appraised as different from the essentialized norms, such a novel norm will be understood as incompatible with the member guidelines. It happens in Ahmadiyya, as stated in one participant comment:

[Indonesia]

Ahmadiyah yang bersumber dari agama Islam tapi dalam pelaksanaannya ada perubahan isi agama sehingga agama Islam yang mereka anut sudah melenceng dari esensi agama Islam. (F18)

[English]

Ahmadiyya is based on Islam, but in implementation there are modifications to the beliefs, so that their version of Islam is a deviation from the essence of Islam. (F18)

From the comment above, it is understood that different, incompatible values cannot be placed together. Once an incompatible value is forced into the codex of the essentialized values, it is considered to be a subversive element in the group values (Sindic & Reicher, 2009).

Muslims who see Ahmadiyya as a deviant or heretical group seem to be troubled as members of Muslim society by Ahmadiyya's activities.

[Indonesia]

Ahmadiyah merupakan aliran yang memahami Islam dalam ajaran Mirza Ghulan Ahmad yang kemudian dalam masa selanjutnya dipahami sebagai nabi. Hal ini yang bagi umat Islam (saya) tidak nyaman dengan aktivitasnya yang tetap mengatasnamakan sebagai Islam. (M24)

[English]

Ahmadiyya is a group who understands Islam through the teachings of Mirza Ghulan Ahmad, who was then regarded as a prophet. For a Muslim (me), this causes discomfort, as in their activities they still bear the name Islam. (M24)

Ahmadiyya is interpreted as unrepresentative of Islam, and thus their existence might threaten the continuity of essentialized Islamic values. Ingroup Muslims are uncomfortable with Ahmadiyya activities because they think that a tainted religion will lessen the blessings received from the true religion.

Because They Are Troubling, They Need to Be Blamed

For Data 2, Sunni participants ($N = 101$) were asked to respond to the statement that the cause of the problems is the Ahmadiyya group itself. Sixty-two participants (61.4%) agreed with the statement, 16 (15.8%) disagreed, and 23 (22.8%) took a neutral or ambiguous position. Concentrating on participants who agreed with the statement and gave reasons ($N = 49$), we can see that Ahmadiyya was perceived by them as a heretic/deviant group ($f = 75.5\%$), as a group that cannot exist/banned group ($f = 22.4\%$), as troubling/threatening ($f = 20.4\%$), and as different from Islam ($f = 12.2\%$).

The characteristics of deviant and threatening or troubling most strongly affected the reason why respondents agreed with the statement that the cause of the problems came from the Ahmadiyya group itself. One of the statements given by a respondent was as follows:

[Indonesia]

Pada dasarnya ajaran Ahmadiyah memang sudah terang-terangan sesat dengan mempercayai selain Nabi Muhammad SAW dan 24 Nabi lainnya. Dikhawatirkan apabila kegiatan agama mereka terus berlangsung akan berdampak buruk pada ajaran syariat Islam. (F21)

Ahmadiyah merupakan sumber masalah tapi tidak terlepas dari pemegang kekuasaan yang tidak menyikapi persoalan ini dengan bijaksana & seolah membiarkan. (M46)

[English]

Basically, Ahmadiyya is obviously heretical by believing in a prophet other than Muhammad SAW and the other 24 prophets. It is feared that if their religious activities keep going, it will have a negative impact on Islamic beliefs. (F21)

¹ We have excluded respondents whose statements were not included for further analysis because they lacked reliability.

Table 2
Sunni Muslims' Perceptions About Ahmadiyya and Christians

About Ahmadiyya			About Christians		
Themes	Count (N = 150)	%	Themes	Count (N = 72)	%
Heretic/deviant	68	45.3	Good/nice	36	50.0
Cannot exist/banned	34	22.7	Victim/marginalized	14	19.4
Victim/marginalized	20	13.3	Not/different from Islam	13	18.1
Not/different from Islam	20	13.3	Strong/solid group	7	9.7
Troubling/threatening	19	12.7	Cannot exist/banned	4	5.6
Good/nice	5	3.3	Heretic/deviant	3	4.2
Hypocritical	5	3.3	Smart	2	2.8
Strong/solid group	2	1.3	Troubling/threatening	1	1.4
Smart	1	0.7			

Ahmadiyya is the source of the problem, but this is also connected to the people of power who did not address this issue wisely and is letting them be. (M46)

This extract from M46 clearly explains that the source of the bad things faced by Ahmadiyya members is to be found within the group itself.

All Islamic groups accept the Quran as a sacred text. Their various interpretations of the Quran and their different practices of worship are what differentiate them from one another. Differences within Islamic groups are considered a grace, but this only applies to groups who are still within the "Islamic corridor" (Alam, 2008; Putra et al., 2017). But what are the limits of that corridor? How far can a group be beyond the limits and still be categorized as Islam, and from which point on are they outside the corridor of Islam? In the case of Ahmadiyya, some respondents have determined that the Ahmadiyya are outside of the Islamic corridor since they accept a prophet after Muhammad.² From interview data, two of interviewees explained:

[Indonesia]

Sebenarnya ahmadiyah mengakui bahwa mereka itu adalah Islam akan tetapi mereka menyatakan bahwa adanya Nabi 15 ah Nabi Muhammad SAW. Sedangkan didalam Islam diajarkan bahwa Nabi terakhir itu adalah Nabi Muhammad SAW. Jadi Islam memandang ahmadiyah itu seperti nggak punya pendirian. (M19)

Itu ajaran terlarang. Itu mereka dapat darimana bahwa ada rasul lagi setelah nabi Muhammad SAW? Mereka Itu ngarang. Yang saya tahu nabi terakhir itu Cuma nabi Muhammad SAW. Itu mereka siapa gurunya? Gak bisa diganggu gugat lagi. Saya cari tuh gurunya, dapat darimana ajaran itu, saya cari. (M28)

[English]

Actually Ahmadiyya claim to be Islam, but they state that there was another prophet after Muhammad SAW, while in Islam it is taught that the last prophet is Prophet Muhammad SAW. So Islam sees Ahmadiyya as fickle. (M19)

This is a forbidden teaching, where do they get the idea that there was another prophet after Muhammad SAW? That's made up. What I know is that the last prophet is only Prophet Muhammad SAW. Who's their teacher? That's inviolable. I want to know the teacher, where did he get that belief, I want to know. (M28)

Beliefs and practices that are considered to be "so" different rather than similar, like Ahmadiyya's beliefs compared to other

mainstream Muslim groups, can be understood as a disruption. Such a large divergence can undermine group values. For this reason, violence targeting Ahmadiyya members is understood as not solely the perpetrator's mistake, because it is believed to be triggered by Ahmadiyya itself. Interviewees explained:

[Indonesia]

Ya mungkin salah dulunya, mungkin itu kesalahan ahmadiyah awalnya. Kenapa mereka melenceng dari ajaran agama Islam. Biar pun mereka islam, tapi bedalah dengan Islam yang sekarang. Mungkin mereka marah lah, Islam yang sesungguhnya marah. Kenapa mereka melenceng dari ajaran Islamnya sendiri gitu. Ya pantas aja ada konflik-konflik seperti itu. (M28)

Interviewer: Yop, menurut anda apakah benar ya letak permasalahan itu ada di Ahmadiyah?

Interviewee: ya, benar. Karena mereka yang bikin umat Islam pada umumnya panas dan emosi, yaitu dengan mengaku Islam tapi ajarannya sudah salah secara total. Apalagi mengaku ada nabi lagi setelah nabi Muhammad. (M23)

[English]

Well maybe it was Ahmadiyya's fault at the beginning. Why do they deviate from Islamic teachings? Even though they are Islam, it is different from Islam now. Maybe they are angry, the real Islam is angry. Why do they deviate from the real Islam itself? No wonder there are conflicts like that. (Bidin, M28)

Interviewer: Yop, in your opinion, is it true that the problem lies in Ahmadiyya?

Interviewee: Yes, true, because they're the one who made Muslims in general bothered and angry, by claiming to be Islam. But the teachings are totally wrong, especially acknowledging another prophet after Muhammad. (M23)

In addition, some interviewees also perceived that such violence toward Ahmadiyya is wrong, but sometimes it is needed to change erroneous ideas.

[Indonesia]

² This accusation has been clarified by an Ahmadiyya representative concerning an interpretation about the prophet. For Ahmadiyya, Muhammad is considered the last or the end prophet for making any new religions. They believe that there will still be a messiah who can save the world and end the wars.

Sebenarnya sih kerusahan kalo ada kekerasan sangat disayangkan. Tetapi itu ibaratnya kita hanya meluruskan sesuai apa yang telah diaqidahkan. (M48)

[English]

Actually riots and violence are unfortunate. But it was like we only right what was wrong, according to the creed. (M48)

Discussion

Our study found that representations of Ahmadiyya among majority Sunni Muslims in Indonesia are linked to the interpretation of acts of mistreatment against Ahmadiyya members. We found that Sunni Muslims who see Ahmadiyya as deviating from Islamic values view Ahmadiyya more negatively than non-Muslim groups (i.e., Christians). Consequently, Ahmadiyya is regarded by them as a disruptive or troubling group, because they have tainted essential elements of Islamic values. Hence, violence targeting Ahmadiyya is deemed acceptable, because Ahmadis are also perceived as “a stone-headed” group that does not want to change their values to be in line with mainstream Islamic values.

It is almost trivial that different groups will differ to a certain degree. However, a given subgroup will continue to be considered part of a common group whenever similarity is found to be more salient than dissimilarity. If dissimilarity is more salient, the subgroup will not be considered part of a common group. Under certain conditions, such a group can be regarded as “deviant” or as “heretic” in the case of a religious group. Ahmadiyya, for some reason, is categorized as strongly divergent from Sunni Islam (Burhani, 2014; Putra et al., 2015). In our study, the case of Ahmadiyya in Indonesia indicates that the deviant subgroup is considered more dangerous than rival outgroups such as Christianity (Putra & Wagner, 2017).

Previous studies have shown that ingroup members with incompatible values can potentially be perceived as undermining the ontological meaning of a group’s identity (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Sindic & Reicher, 2009; Wagner et al., 2009). Incompatible values can be regarded as a trigger for dominant majority group members to think that the mere existence of such a deviant group may damage the group identity, thus making them inconvenient and threatening. For this reason, it can be understood why the enemy from within is considered more dangerous than a hostile outgroup; the ingroup is undermined by the invisible enemies masquerading as part of the group.

We argue that perceiving Ahmadiyya as “dangerous,” that is, as an enemy from within, is an antecedent for Muslims to step up in blaming Ahmadiyya for acts of violence against themselves. Moreover, our study shows that the reasons for blaming Ahmadiyya can be explained with three models of reasoning. First, when Sunni Muslims think that Ahmadiyya’s values are heretical and troubling, violence toward them is understood as something they deserve (Hafer, 2000). In other words, “Ahmadiyya got what they deserved.” Second, some Sunni Muslim respondents might think that violence perpetrated by fellow Muslims seems wrong, but sometimes such violence is needed to teach a lesson and provide a deterrent effect (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). In other words, “violence is considered wrong but it is not that bad,” and thus the Muslim perpetrators do not need to be sanctioned. Third, such violence is understood to have happened because of Ahmadiyya’s

very existence (i.e., values). Because of their troubling values, violence appears as the consequence. Here, violence is used as a tool to ban Ahmadiyya. In this reasoning, “it is because of Ahmadiyya’s existence, therefore violence occurs.”

The study presented here focused on understanding victim blaming with regard to the Ahmadiyya group. It is clear that the reasons we found for the victim blaming of the Ahmadiyya might apply to other cases of victimized groups as well. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the victim blaming phenomenon with regard to other groups.

In conclusion, the present study has revealed several potential reasons why a group is blamed. In the context of intrareligious groups, a subgroup might first be labeled as heretical, that is, incompatible with common religious values, or so different that the group could taint or undermine religious values of the “mainstream” group. Second, their existence is then regarded as a threat and as a disruption for members of the mainstream group. In the end, when violence is perpetrated by a dominant majority group, the blame will be borne by the victims because of their negative characteristics.

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Received August 18, 2016
 Revision received March 28, 2017
 Accepted February 12, 2018 ■

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