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4 Identity, representations, religion, and apologizing for past wrongdoings: Muslim discourse about Indonesia's 1965–66 massacres of communists


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Abstract

Since 1965, in Indonesia, people labelled as communists and their descendants have been mistreated. Recently, there has been an issue to apologize to them, but up until now, no official apology has been offered by the Indonesian government. The present study aims to understand how communism is perceived in Indonesia and why communism attributes labelled to a person can lead to negative effects, such as social exclusions. We interviewed 23 Muslims living in Jakarta (i.e., majority group) and used a thematic analysis to organize and describe the data. We found that Muslims who see communists as non-believers view communist members as dangerous and a threat for the unity of the Republic of Indonesia. Among participants with such beliefs, the past maltreatments to accused communists are justified and legitimate; any apology toward the victims is considered not needed. The findings are discussed in the context of collective blaming and group essentialization, and ways to solve the problems are suggested.

KEYWORDS

collective blaming, dehumanization, demonization, past maltreatment

1 | ATROCITIES AND PERPETRATORS' PUNISHMENT

During 1960s to the end of 1970s, in Asia, there were three events reported as extreme mass massacre, which took more than 500,000 lives. During 1965–1966, in Indonesia, people who were accused as **Indonesia Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI) members**, supporters, or sympathizers were executed or jailed without trials. It was estimated that about 500,000 to 1,000,000 people died (Wardaya, 2013). In 1971, about 200,000 to 3,000,000 Bangladeshi people were killed by the Pakistani military and its supporters of Islamist militia, *Jamaat e Islami* (i.e., Islamic party; see Bose, 2011). Between 1975 and 1979, in Cambodia, it was estimated that about 1,500,000 to 3,000,000 people categorized as "enemies," such as people connected to former government and/or to foreign government, professionals and intellectuals, nonindigenous Cambodians, and "economic saboteurs" were killed by Cambodian communist party Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot (see Hannum, 1989; Heuveline, 1998).

In two of the three events, the Cambodia and Bangladesh massacre, the "main" perpetrators had been put on trials and admitted their wrongdoing.¹ In contrast, in Indonesia, the perpetrators have not been processed legally, and no apology has been declared by the Indonesian government for such wrongdoing. Up until now, despite responses of recent international human rights activists asking Indonesian government to apologize for what the accused communist party members have had to endure, nothing has come to fruition. Instead, what has happened in Indonesia is that the victims were extended to include the PKI descents; to this day, they have difficulty to work for the government, serve in the military, and find a job in private companies. The present study seeks answers why "Indonesia" refuses to apologize to the victims of the "1965–66" massacre, and why the demand for justice for the "1965–66" victims was never met?

2 | REPRESENTING POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN INDONESIA

Social representation theory posits that the members of social groups develop representations of the objects and issues in their world by conversation and societal discourse (Jodelet, 2008; Moscovici, 2008). These social representations are crucial for holding the members of groups together and comprise knowledge, beliefs, and values defining the objects in their local world (Wagner, Kello, & Rämmer, 2018). By their being shared to a certain degree between members, they are crucial for determining the personal and social identity that people develop of themselves as shown in identity process theory (Breakwell, 2015; see also Howarth, 2014). This theory maintains that groups are held together by the representational content circumscribing the world of social objects, that is, the identity content configuration, as well as by the values attached to, and implied by these objects. More often than not, these value connotations, when violated, have action consequences trying to rectify violated values by punishing the violators.

Now, groups do not live in isolation and confront other social groups, mostly peacefully, but sometimes also charged with tension. Such neighbouring groups are necessarily also part of a group's system of social representations, and their image is represented in the form of intergroup stereotypes and prejudice (Wagner, Raudsepp, Holtz, & Sen, 2017). As a necessity, members of different groups interact in their daily life and obtain some knowledge of the outgroups' world view. This knowledge is necessary for interaction and group contact and has been called "holomorphic," which is Greek for a representation encompassing knowledge of one's own and metaknowledge of other groups' representations (Wagner & Hayes, 2005; see also Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011). People's identity, hence, is a complex structure predicated by representational contents, values, and actions, where political ideologies and religious beliefs reside.

In regard to issues of political ideologies in Indonesia, prior to 1965, nationalism, religion, and communism lived together and were represented by political parties. This was shown on the first national political parties' election in 1955. The five (of 172 parties in total) largest political parties were three religious (Masyumi, Nahdlatul Ulama/NU, and Partai Syarikat Islam Indonesia/PSII), one communist (Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI), and one nationalist (Partai Nasionalisme Indonesia/Indonesia Nationalism Party/PNI; Wardaya, 2013). According to Soekarno (the first President

of Indonesia), values in religion, nationalism, and socialism (represented by communism) were factors that would unite cultural diversities within Indonesia. However, after the alleged coup attempt by PKI members on September 30, 1965, Soekarno was replaced by Soeharto. Since then, socialist and communist ideas were banned. Until today, communism is presented as evil (Putra, Holtz, Pitaloka, Kronberger, & Arbiyah, 2018; Belarminus, 2017) making Indonesia a country without any left-wing political party (Lane, 2018). Above all, the Indonesians' compulsory identity card must contain an entry of one of six officially recognized religions. A blank entry is not accepted.

The blame for the coup in 1965 was pinned on PKI planning some rebellion, which led to its ban afterwards. It was communicated that PKI had killed six high-ranking Indonesian army generals after torture (Heryanto, 2013). In the ensuing discourse, people developed stories about PKI being atheist, traitors, evil, and dangerous (see Wardaya, 2013). In the end, these emerging representations justified rejecting and eradicating PKI in almost all of Indonesia. In effect, not only PKI members but also any person related or acquainted with a supposed PKI member were tortured, arrested, or died in the hands of mobs. The mass killings rank as one of the worst in the 20th century (e.g., Schmitz, 2006). Until now, those who were once imprisoned or descended from people who were accused of being PKI members are still suspected and stigmatized (Putra et al., 2018). Additionally, until 2001, PKI descendants were given a special mark in their identity cards, much like German Jews were forced to wear a yellow star on their garment during Nazi times.²

During the 1980s and later, the stigma of PKI was conveyed in school textbooks and films. School textbooks described the PKI as barbarian and antireligious (see for example Mustopo & Waluyo, 2011). The public's sentiment was further reinforced by the movie "Penghianatan G30S/PKI (The Eradication of G30S PKI Treason)" (Noer, 1984), which was mandatory viewing for students on September 30 every year from 1984 to 1998 (Putra et al., 2018). During those years, the majority of students in Indonesia had watched the movie more than once. This propaganda movie depicted PKI members as inhumane, abusive, and habitually murderous. The female members of PKI were depicted as slashing their enemies' faces using razor blades. Consequently, the average Indonesian tends to see communism in a massively negative way until today.

Just recently, a survey study conducted in Yogyakarta and Solo, Indonesia, by Hakim, Liu, Isler, and Woodward (2015) showed that the September 30, 1965 events were depicted as the second most important events in Indonesia and topping all others in terms of negativity. In this sense, it is quite common for politicians to use PKI issue to topple their political opponents. For example, during the presidential election in 2014, Joko Widodo, who was one of the presidential candidates and now the sixth president of Indonesia, was reported to be a communist stooge and a PKI descendant. Consequently, this label affected the votes. Preelection surveys showed that support for Joko Widodo dropped from 49.9% in May to 45.5% in June 2014 (Firdaus, 2014) even though he won at the end.

Another common thing in Indonesia is that when a community holds a meeting accused of dealing with social justice or PKI-related themes, even if it only was a family gathering of victims' descendants, it can trigger anti-PKI protests. One example was the incident where Jakarta Legal Aid Institute office was attacked for holding an art event attended by activists, artists, and victims of 1965 (Anya, 2017). The masses threw stones at the office building and shouted "ganyang PKI" (i.e., crush PKI).

3 | INTERGROUP VIOLENCE AND APOLOGY

How can ordinary people support inhuman conduct, even when it was targeted to "outgroup members who themselves were not the direct causal agents on the original attack" (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, & Denson, 2006, p. 373) and refuse to acknowledge past wrongdoings? Previous studies have shown that such acts may occur when an outgroup is constructed as the instigator of a violent conflict, and all members are responsible for what happened (Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012; Lickel et al., 2006). The mechanism can be psychological essentialism: Every person in a group can become the victim of retaliation and revenge if the group's negative essence is projected upon its members. By attributing group essence on people, they are perceived as homogeneous and as possessing the same attributes (Medin & Ortony, 1989).

Group essentialization provides the basis for considering all outgroup members as personally responsible, making them the rightful targets of scorn and blame (Hafer, 2000; Niemi & Young, 2016). This process is also at work when majority Sunni Muslims aggress believers of the minority Ahmadiyya Muslims in Indonesia (Putra, Holtz, & Rufaedah, 2018).

It is important to note that in most cultures, such atrocities violate social norms and often are sanctioned (Bandura, 1999). In certain contexts, however, people may avoid a moral sanction at which the use of violence is justified (Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010). Even though group members may state that inhuman acts are morally wrong, such insight cannot guarantee a declaration of apology and acknowledgement of past wrongdoing (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). They may acknowledge the past wrongdoing, when they think that may serve a pointedly positive moral image (McNeil, Lyons, & Pehrson, 2013).

There are at least three considerations a group can excuse its own past wrongdoing despite insight in its moral reprehensibility: First is the understanding that by their very essence as members of PKI, people may only receive what is fair in a "Just World" and not in need of apology (see Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). Conditions that lead to this conclusion are considering the violated outgroup as subhuman or non-human at all; the group has been dehumanized (Haslam, 2006; Holtz & Wagner, 2012). In the present case, PKI, its essentialized members and their descendants are labelled as lacking humanness (Haslam, 2006).

Second, even though the group admits that the past maltreatment toward people labelled as PKI is wrong, people may also think that if the government apologizes, this could be internationally seen as an embarrassment and weaken Indonesia's standing in the international community (see Brown, Zagefka, González, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008). Such considerations may motivate the government to postpone an apology, particularly in countries that strive for the world's recognition.

Third, denying past wrongdoing can be framed as a generational issue, where the later contemporary generation was not involved in and cannot be blamed for (Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010). That is, people may reject the inhuman acts but not acknowledge their being part of it due to the distance in time: "yes, it's wrong but it is not us who did it."

Nonetheless, as the explanations above are argumentative and do not have a strong empirical evidence in Indonesian context, the present study, then, aims to deeply explore the understandings of Indonesians, especially to majority group of Indonesian Muslims as they are the ones who reject the apology and reconciliation of the 1965–66 massacre on what they think of PKI and what they think of an apology for Indonesians's past maltreatment of accused PKI affiliates.

4 | OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, as there has been an increasing rejection, in particular among majority Muslims, of the issues on (a) apology toward the maltreatment of accused PKI affiliates and (b) the emergence of communism in Indonesia. The reason for using Muslims is that at present, it is them and the military who most aggressively oppose any apology (BBC, 2016). In fact, calling political opponents sympathizers of PKI is a frequent strategy in election campaigns. Consequently, everything remotely related to PKI such as a family gathering of victims can trigger aggressive responses by Muslims (Anya, 2017).

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Participants

Twenty-three Muslims living in Jakarta participated in interviews set between February and March 2016, aged between 21 and 64 years old. The participants consisted of five clerics, four civil servants (one retired), four public figures, five regular employees, and four small traders, with 11 males and 12 females.

5.2 | Procedure and material

In the beginning, we started to develop potential participants categorization based on clerics, civil servants, public figures, regular employees, and traders, which was set at least could represent Muslims' perceptions from many backgrounds. Before the interview, the participants were asked to fulfil informed consent informing that the participation in the interview is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

A list of questions was prepared to guide the interviewing flow. Some of those were the following: What is the participant's opinion on PKI? Who killed the army generals on the incident in '65? What if PKI rises again? Is PKI dangerous? What is the participant's opinion on PKI descendants? What if a PKI descendant becomes a leader like president, minister, other high-ranking officials? What if the government issue an apology regarding the '65 incident? What is the participant's opinion on the killing, jailing, and torture of accused PKI without proper legal process? How should we respond to and treat the descendants of accused PKI?

5.3 | Analysis

Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data was used. Thematic analysis could help us organize and describe data set in detail, by keeping the data as the expression of the participants' thoughts, emotions, and motivations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, thematic analysis is used to "accumulate and group a meaningful set of statements" (Parker, 2013, p. 229) or metaphors around issues or discourse on communism, as well as how the participants positioned their thought on communism issues. The data interviews were transcribed, so that it could be categorized and managed with other text data. The text data were then identified, categorized into common themes, and translated. Extracts from interviewees' statements were marked with "F" for female and "M" for male, following initial name and age.

6 | RESULTS

In this part, we present the results into three themes: communism, evil, and atheism; victims and apology issue; and relatives and sympathizers as victims.

6.1 | Communism, evil, and atheism

Many people who believe in monotheism view that there is relationship between atheism and evil (Loren & Rambo, 2019), that atheists have no morality, which may lead them to do inhuman acts. It is also the case with most of our Muslim participants when they perceive communism. Most of participants ($N = 19$) see communism, that is, PKI, as dangerous because it is understood as cruel, have no mercy, and sadistic. They believe that cruel things can only be done by immoral non-believers or atheists:

Interviewer: In your opinion, is PKI dangerous?

FB64: Of course dangerous. And well hopefully it will not happen again like in the past.... If for example right now it still exists, [...] we must be vigilant so that it will not happen again[...] like people just slashing other people, taking stuff, and then kill them, people are asleep then got called and told to get out and suddenly they are shot, like that.

Interviewer: But was that really PKI who did all that?

FB64: Well who else if not PKI?

FEF21: Of course PKI is dangerous; dangerous for us, for other people, especially for the country, because they want us [...] to be atheists. You know right, atheists do not believe that God exists.

In the extracts above, it is so clear what is in the participants' minds that they only see PKI as cruel, barbarous, and dangerous. By them, atheism is always associated to ruthless killers. Even we see that this atheism–communist–evil discourse has been such a hegemonic representation as there was a regulation in Indonesia for forbidding **accused PKI members and descendants to work for government or in military**. Of this particular issue, Sukanta (2011) described how a child of an accused PKI lost access to join **Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI)** or **become civil servants**; the state has marked him as the child of a PKI member so that he could not have those two professions.

What is interesting, instead of seeing it as a problem, one of interviewees believed that the regulation is for anticipation if the descendants may have a plan for revenge.

Interviewer: By the way, there was a regulation that said PKI members cannot be civil servants or join the army, and they are not equal to other citizens, what do you think?

FLS38: [...] Personally I think the state did that because afraid that, later on, these PKI descendants still inherit their ancestors' traits. It is feared they would take revenge, probably. So, it looks make sense that there's such regulation.[...] I call it as anticipation.

There were also participants who believed that the ban was the right thing to do in the years around '65, but now it is not right anymore.

Well right now that's violation of human rights. [...] However, if it was in the old time then it was fair, the government was afraid they would infiltrate those institutions and take revenge. (FD35)

Two extracts above explain that participants acknowledge that the regulation forbidding accused PKI descendants to work or serve in government offices is wrong, and they consider that those descendants have to be treated like other citizens. Hence, even though they see that accused PKI descendants have rights as citizens, the two participants (i.e., FLS38 and FD35) also think that they have to be monitored and are suspicious. This seems, of course, contradicting the opinion that the PKI descendants have equal rights. Of this finding, we see that in Indonesian society, PKI labelling as atheism–evil thing is being transmitted across generations as a clear example of descendants having inherited the essence of their parents' communist attitudes, that is an essence deriving not from biological or ethnic characteristics, but by chosen membership in a group (Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009).

We also found interviewees who believed that evil things cannot be transmitted through blood, and the attempted rebellion was not only, if at all, by PKI. For example:

FD40: [...] There are many theories, it could be PKI was made as it looks like PKI as the only perpetrator, but who was the real mastermind behind it, we never know. So many theories about the mastermind, one said it was actually the CIA.

Interviewer: CIA?

FD40: Yeah, so they set a chaos to take over the power, then PKI became the scapegoat.

The last extracts highlight that it is the information base the interviewees' dispose of that determines their stance on blaming PKI members' descendants. Indonesians who follow the official ideology and state propaganda naturally favour vigilance. Those doubting the mainstream narrative of the events in 1965 are probably also individuals subscribing to an alternative social representation all together. They are likely to be more educated, to consult alternative sources of information, and to be more critical in their judgements.

6.2 | Victims and apology

Despite speculations about who was behind the 1965 incident, most of our participants ($N = 13$) followed the official narrative and believed that PKI members were the mastermind. This can be shown in three of opinions as follows:

Obviously, in history (the actors of '65 incident were PKI) known either from history lessons or stories from the people around Jakarta, who had experienced the insurgency against the Republic of Indonesia. Because that movement was systematic, it had grown from the era of the first insurgency. (MW46)

I am sure PKI as the mastemind, because we see the history, we read and we saw on television too, stories about the troubles of communists. (FT56)

In my opinion it is definitely clear that the perpetrators were high officials of PKI, for personal or political purposes, even from some million dead victims many were great kyais (i.e. Islamic clerics) who were murdered, Masha Allah (i.e. oh my God), I'm really sad thinking about it. (FMA45)

The participants used the word "obvious," "sure," and "definitely" in their descriptions. The sources of information were newspaper, movie about PKI on TV, history lessons in school, and stories that spread in society. Through the extracts above, it is shown that participants felt that the ones to blame is not just the perpetrators but also all of PKI members. This phenomenon in psychology is known as collective blame that whole members of a group are considered responsible for the actions of a few (Lickel et al., 2006). We see that this is the reason why apologizing for the maltreatment is considered not necessary, because they are considered as bad people associated with evil.

[...] The government is not wrong, if you (i.e. government) apologize then you are wrong [...] and in '65 that was the treason done by PKI to this state. And in the villages in the past, in my region, people seldom slept inside the house, they hide, at 12 midnight people go out of the house [...] because if they were inside the house, they would not know if there were PKI and entered their house [...] My parents were also like that, so what happened was, in my village every well was guarded because PKI tended to poison it, so at night people rarely slept, the issues were like those, but I do not know if it's real or not but people rarely slept. PKI people were also said to tore down the mosque by reason of road extension. This is a form of insult toward Islam. (MVI59)

Interviewer: But is not the government supposed to be doing that through a legal process first, cannot the government do that without going through legal process?

MAH35: I'm sure it's not that the government was acting arbitrarily, but the government did that based on facts and existing proofs. Based on my mother's explanation, at that time there was some kind of a manoeuvre, movement in PKI, everyone got membership cards, so the government knew the data, who were the members, they were definitely caught. Like at that time employees, laborers, army, they did not know anything but later it was certified through membership card, which means there's the data about who's who, let alone the commoners, many officers were also involved.

The extract above explains that the eradication of PKI members was positive, as PKI was considered to threaten people. It also indicates that such wrongdoing is morally justified as it meant to eradicate evil, through which it can avoid moral sanctions (Bandura, 1999; Holtz & Wagner, 2012). It has been shown that faithful members of highly religious societies strongly tend to feel that their religious belonging is something stable like a natural condition, morally inevitable (see Chalik, Leslie, & Rhodes, 2017; Toosi & Ambady, 2011)—an essence, in other words—and that "heretics" must either be persuaded or eliminated. Unbelievers may be followers of other religions or in the worst case atheists because they negate a god's existence all together and thereby threaten the very base of theistic beliefs. As a consequence, atheists "deserve" physical elimination.

Another statement explored that apology is not needed as both sides are victims. An interviewee expresses this clearly when he mentions that "we are all victims, so therefore we must unite, I think it's not necessary for the government to apologize" (MAH35) and "did the government apologize to them too? To the kyais (i.e. Islamic clerics/teachers) [...] and *santris* (i.e., students of Islamic boarding school) that were killed by PKI." (FD40) Respondents justify

denying apology because PKI also committed wrongdoings and has not apologized, which in fact would be very difficult as all alleged perpetrators are dead. This view sets own crimes off by sweepingly referring to another side's crimes.

One claim in this context is that it should have been the original government by Soeharto, who was to blame and therefore should have apologized and not the present one.

The current government is not the same as the past government, many of them has died [...] Isn't it weird, if apologizing, to whom? Right? ... The old ones are already senile. Then be it, do not need to mention it again, put it in the past, bury it... (FD62)

Again, such denial above is used to avoid to acknowledge the past wrongdoing of "yes, it's wrong but it is not us who did it."

6.3 | Relatives and sympathizers as victims

Not only PKI members, their relatives and sympathizers, which is generally called as "PKI" People also could not escape the atrocities. This comprehensive stereotyping of PKI people justifies their treatment in the past as necessary and therefore there is nothing to apologize for. The majority of the sample (N = 16) agreed to this opinion also in the light that it all happened decades ago.

I do not think it's necessary, because the incident was decades ago, let us just make it a lesson for the future, no need to apologize to PKI members, what's done is done, and anyway we cannot say that PKI was innocent, even though they were not the killers of the generals, but we do not agree with what PKI is applying in Indonesia. The important thing is that the government does not discriminate the descendants and equalize their rights. (FEF21)

For some respondents apologizing means that Indonesia acknowledges past wrongdoings, which may not actually have happened.

No need, what for? It's them who were proven guilty, [...] even in religion if you are guilty you get punished, and anyway if we apologize it will look like we are the one who's at fault, while it's obviously them who wanted to ruin the country, ruin our ideology. (FMA45)

For the small minority of respondents who think that Indonesia needs to apologize (N = 4), most of them said that the descendants of PKI are also humans that need to be treated equally.

Interviewer: In your opinion, should the government apologize to families of accused PKI?

MDAS23: Yes, the government needs to apologize because PKI members were once Indonesian citizens, so it's only natural to apologize to the families if in the past the parents were punished for being PKI members, joining the communists.

Interviewer: And if the government wants to give PKI descendants their rights, is that OK?

MDAS23: It's fine, they are also Indonesian citizens, right. Even though their parents were PKI, do they really want to follow bad examples? Everyone can change, also their ideology can change.

Even though most participants had negative views about PKI, when talking about the descendants, they did not hold the same view. Some considered that the offspring cannot be blamed for the mistake of the parents. From here, we see that when participants thought to humanize others (Putra et al., 2018), they perceive PKI more positively.

On the other hand, respondents who tended to dehumanize PKI affiliates and their relatives warned that apology should not be overdone as not to damage Indonesia's pride: "... don't let us undermine the dignity's of our people. Still apologize, but be reasonable." (MDAS23)

Finally, one solution would be to educate PKI member descendants besides monitoring them:

We have to give [...] understanding to them especially related to religion, we make them understand the atheists, [...] and we give advice and education, especially in aqidah (i.e. Islamic teology). (MLM36)

The interviews show that many Indonesians subscribe to an essentialist opinion that allows to see the "fundamental evil" represented by PKI membership to "be in the blood" and therefore to taint the members' descendants by giving them the same attribute of "evilness" as their parents.

7 | DISCUSSION: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS, IDENTITY, AND RELIGION VERSUS ATHEISM

With Muslim participants, our study has presented how PKI is understood and how "Indonesians" have to deal with issues of past maltreatments toward people who are accused to be affiliated with PKI. We found that Muslims who see PKI as "non-believers" view PKI members as cruel, savage, or evil. This view, then, leads to an understanding that such maltreatment of accused PKI members is justified, so that any apology to the victims is considered not needed. Even when some people think that the maltreatment was wrong, it is still considered acceptable (see also Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006).

How can we connect the findings in the light of the initial theoretical framework of representations, identity, metaknowledge, and such denial of the past wrongdoing? We stated before that the content configuration and the values attached to the social objects that determines a social group's are constitutive for the group members' social identity. Together with the metaknowledge about outgroups' beliefs and representations, this "holomorphic" representational system underlies intergroup interaction and provides the background scaffold of ideologies and religious beliefs, at least in guiding what is wrong and right.

There are several implications of this model: First, in intergroup perception, group members tend to essentialize their own identity and the stereotypes they hold of the outgroup. In effect, attributing an essence onto something means to let the thing appear as more natural and stable than acquired and ephemeral and as an inherent attribute that cannot be shed by the bearer; and—because it is more natural than ephemeral—it can be transmitted to one's offspring. Attributing essence is the way how group-related representations such as identities and stereotypes are objectified. Essentialist attributions also imply that all members of a group equally share in the respective attribute (Mahalingam, 2007; Wagner et al., 2009). By the same logic, victims of Muslim terrorism, for example, in the West, tend to attribute a violent character to the whole community of Muslims (Lee et al., 2013).

Second, metaknowledge of an outgroup's representational system by and large may be in tune with one own group's core representations or conflicting (Elcheroth et al., 2011). It is clear that the intergroup behaviour consequences for the two constellations are likely to be crucially different (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). In the former case, nothing stands in the way of regular cooperation between members of the two groups. In the latter case of conflicting representations, either avoidance or enmity will be the consequence. This will be the more pronounced, the more value laden the conflicting representations are, and the more relevant the conflict is for the group members' identity and self-image (see, e.g., Sen & Wagner, 2005).

Third, what applies to the in group applies to the outgroup vice versa: The representational and value system of both constitute their mutual identities. If the identities are objectified by mutually attributing essentialist notions, the more solidly the differences in conflicting representations, metarepresentations, and identities will be perceived to the degree of virtually complete incompatibility.

Now, if we are talking about religious components in the system of social representations and identities, it can be expected that the attached religious values will intensify all aforementioned effects particularly in the case of strongly faithful and fundamentalist groups. Deeply religious persons of any faith will experience an irreconcilable hiatus between their own and the beliefs of other religions, but even more so between their belief in a god and an atheist's negating any god's existence. If faith and belief in a god are constitutive of a person's identity, negating their god's

existence can be understood as negating their entire identity, it poses an identity threat. Hence, in many religions, the beliefs of deeply faithful demands elimination of the faithless, which is and has been used as a ploy by the wielders of power to stimulate intergroup violence to their own advantage. It is not far-fetched to expect such confrontations to result in violence as has been shown the world over: A threat to a group's religious identity construction often leads to acts of terrorism and atrocities (see Atran & Ginges, 2012).

In the case of the present study, we find many elements that illustrate the aforementioned model. First, justifying the violence against communist groups by insinuating that these groups planned a rebellion was easily possible by marking them as heretics and even atheists. Stripping the members of the PKI of their humanity and ostracizing them because of their opposition to a faith in God was an easy way to involve the Muslim population in violence (Putra et al., 2018).

Second, requesting an act of apology for the past maltreatment after many decades was rejected by many interviewees because of their perception that the bloody suppression of communists was justified by their atheism that threatens and implicitly negates Muslim believers' identity. By essentializing communist beliefs and atheism as being immutable, unalterable, and factually innate, the perfect image of an enemy incarnating evil was constructed that could be murdered with impunity (Putra & Wagner, 2017). In this regard, it is reasonable to deny the past maltreatments to the accused PKI affiliates as wrong.

Third, presenting the evil atheist and communist beliefs as essentialized and potentially innate attributes creates the mental shortcut to be watchfully vigilant against the family members and friends of former victims (see Lickel et al., 2006). This in turn justifies to block these people from entering jobs in state administration and military. The earmarked identity cards of those categorized as potential enemies finally represents the tip of this conspiracy theory by making the invisible substance of "evil essence" officially visible.

In conclusion, the present study does not result in a hopeful outlook. Intergroup processes and their psychological reasons will always be used for personal gains of the powerful. The only hope are initiatives that attempt to revert the effects of wrongly understood psychological essentialism (e.g., Putra et al., 2018). The same must be reached with regard to apologies for the past wrongdoing. At the end, it is those communities that have engaged in deep soul searching that are the least prone to become aggressive again.

ENDNOTES

¹In the case of Bangladesh genocide, there is still no formal recognition from the Pakistani government for the wrongdoing.

²We are not aware that there would have been any country in the world protesting against this blatant stigmatization of a large section of the population.

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