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## Representations and Discourse about Religion and Chinese Descendants in 2012 Jakarta's Election

Idhamsyah Eka Putra

*Persada Indonesia University*, [idhamsyah.ekaputra@gmail.com](mailto:idhamsyah.ekaputra@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze rhetorical rejections from Muslims, a majority group, who refused a non-Muslim Chinese candidate in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election. The study focuses to explore (1) the social representations of the Chinese and how it was used to attack the Chinese candidate and (2) a construction process of a "new" social representation on how a religious teaching was constructed to have nothing to do with negative sentiments or hatred. The field study focused on analyzing the sequential events related to the sermon of a prominent Islamic figure, his denial of the hate contents in his sermon, and the support he received from his Muslim supporters. The results showed that when the Chinese are negatively represented, a Chinese is considered unfit to lead Jakarta as he may disgrace the nation. Moreover, it is found that when a rhetorical rejection toward a non-Muslim is supported by a religious teaching, such rejection is considered not related to negative sentiments.

### Keywords

Prejudice, Social Identity, Social Representations, Hate Speech

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Idhamsyah Eka Putra

Persada Indonesia University, Jakarta, Indonesia

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*The aim of this paper is to analyze rhetorical rejections from Muslims, a majority group, who refused a non-Muslim Chinese candidate in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election. The study focuses to explore (1) the social representations of the Chinese and how it was used to attack the Chinese candidate and (2) a construction process of a "new" social representation on how a religious teaching was constructed to have nothing to do with negative sentiments or hatred. The field study focused on analyzing the sequential events related to the sermon of a prominent Islamic figure, his denial of the hate contents in his sermon, and the support he received from his Muslim supporters. The results showed that when the Chinese are negatively represented, a Chinese is considered unfit to lead Jakarta as he may disgrace the nation. Moreover, it is found that when a rhetorical rejection toward a non-Muslim is supported by a religious teaching, such rejection is considered not related to negative sentiments. Keywords: Prejudice, Social Identity, Social Representations, Hate Speech*

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Q: What do you think about your Chinese (descendant) friend, can we call her/him as Indonesian?

A: Not really. She/he is Chinese, so ...Yeah... She/he is a half Indonesian. (F: 12)

I began this paper with the quotation above to show how Chinese descendants are currently categorized in Indonesia, even though they have been living in Indonesia for centuries. The question was asked to a 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school girl when we had dinner together at a family gathering in 2011. Indonesia is a country with hundreds of ethnicities, cultures, and languages, united since 1928 through the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the unifying language. However, the quotation above illustrates that not all ethnicities, cultures, and religions are accepted as part of Indonesia; for example the Chinese descendants who currently live in Indonesia. In effect of this, discrimination toward the Chinese emerged almost in all provinces of Indonesia. Regardless of "their diverse origins, spoken language, number of generations since arriving in Indonesia, or mixing with non-Chinese, they became increasingly as a single category of 'Chinese'" (Betrand, 2004, p. 45). In this paper, I call the Chinese descendants as the Chinese as in Indonesia the use of the word "Cina" which literally translates as Chinese/China, refers to the Chinese descendants.

Discrimination toward minority groups is a phenomenon not unique to Indonesia; rather it occurs in every place. However, nowadays explicit discrimination and prejudice are normatively forbidden through which it has led to a new style of prejudicing; prejudice occur in more implicit or hidden ways (Durrheim, 2012). In this matter, in order to cover hatred toward a certain group, a racist may show reasons why he/she hates or discriminate the outgroup members. These reasons, then, can make him/her to avoid moral sanctions and deny prejudicing.

The contents of the reasons are contextual and depend on the situation that occurred. For examples, it can be from survey results informing that in USA, the numbers of crime rates within black people are higher compared to white people, in which the results are used by a white rental owner to reject black people to rent the apartment. It can also be from knowledge developed in a white European community describing that immigrants are troublemakers; hence aids toward immigrants are considered not necessary. Other than those examples, there are of course reasons used to deny prejudice or hatred. Any other findings of such denial are important in order to develop intergroup tolerance.

Little, if anything, is known about the political discourse and denial of hatred within religious groups and in a place where religion is considered important. Indonesia is a country that put religion as an important factor. Given this description, this paper focuses on analyzing the political rhetoric of rejecting a non-Muslim Chinese candidate in 2012 gubernatorial election in Jakarta; in particular whether or not the rejection should be viewed as constituting negative sentiment. I analyzed the case by using social representations approach (Elcherath, Doise, & Reicher, 2011), because this approach can help to understand world-making representations about who is the Chinese and what is called religiosity in everyday public discourse (Wagner & Hayes, 2005).

### **Representations and Discourse of Hate Speech, Prejudice, and Religion**

Hate speech is a speech that attacks, insults, or mocks a person or a group based on social attributes such as religion, ethnicity, race, or gender (Leader, Mullen, & Rice, 2009). In many countries, hate speech is forbidden as it is considered to influence prejudicial actions and intergroup hostilities.

But who can be called as a hate speaker, prejudiced, or racist? Research conducted by Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) show that in USA, most White Americans cannot recognize their own prejudices. Some of them tend to associate prejudice to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), where people in white robes are burning people on crosses (O'Brien, Crandall, Horstman-Reser, Warner, 2010). Even when their thinking and act relate to anti-black sentiments, White Americans often do not consider themselves as racist (Feagin & Vera, 1995). It appears that what is considered as prejudiced depends on the social representations of prejudice, that is, the public's consensual understanding of what constitutes prejudice within a certain context or group (O'Brien et al., 2010; Moscovici & Perez, 1997).

Social representation (Moscovici 1961/2008) is understood as a system of knowledge that guides individuals of what to think and what to do. It gives people the ability to cultivate ideas on how they should communicate with others. In social interaction, people can communicate with each other because they have a mutual core of ideas which represent something they shared. This shared knowledge is constructed, communicated, and discoursed in the interactions of group members (Wagner, 1995, 1998).

More often, social representations approach interrelate social representations and social identity phenomena. It is because "identity is crucial to social representation: without this concept we cannot explain why particular people have different perspectives, draw on particular representations, defend them in the ways they do, and why other representations are ignored or contested" (Howarth, 2014, pp. 4.2-4.3). In this paper, social identity is defined as a reflexive group "where the members know their affiliation and have criteria available to decide who else is also a member" (Wagner, 1995, p. 127). Taking this perspective seriously, researching representations of a certain social object and how it is constructed would mean to observe the content of the representations that is "being enacted by social actors through their situated discourse and other activity" (Wagner, Mecha, & Carvalho, 2003, p. 33)

In my understanding, discourse is any talking or writing of a topic in a social context (van Dijk, 2000), that is situated and action-oriented. It is situated because “talk and texts are embedded in some kind of sequence of interaction and in some kind of context” (Potter & Edwards, 2001, p. 104). It is action-oriented because people do things with words and present themselves to others in specific ways; often “some discrete set of words correspond to a discrete act” (Potter & Edwards, 2001, p. 105).

As considered to have common background knowledge, group members are able to locate themselves within a common discursive space (Wagner, 1995). In the communication about a discourse, group members play as producers as well as recipients of the knowledge system. This discourse in groups, then, can lead to a construction of a new social representation (Wagner, 1998).

In Indonesia, religion has a significant contribution in many aspects of life such as in politics, economic, and culture. In politics, at least one of Islamic political parties is always in the top five. “Belief in God” is placed as one of Indonesia’s state ideological pillars, *Pancasila* (Mashuri, Supriyono, Khotimah, Sakdiah, Sukmawati, & Zaduqisti, 2014). Usually, religious people are understood as “good people” whereas unreligious people are perceived otherwise. In fact, atheism is forbidden in Indonesia. Given this description, it is plausible that, in certain groups, any such discourse related to religion is represented as morally good.

In some regards, Indonesian politicians can use religious elements as a tool to tackle their political opponents. Some members of the majority Muslims, for example, might raise issues that non-Muslims are not allowed to lead a region where the majority of the residents are Muslims. As a matter of fact, this situation occurred in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, where religious elements were used as a tool to reject a non-Muslim Chinese candidate. A prominent cleric, Rhoma Irama, and his supporters persuaded Muslims living in Jakarta to not vote for the Chinese candidate. One of his sermons had been accused of having negative sentiments targeting the Chinese candidate; yet, it was then denied and recognized as religious sermon per se. Therefore, this paper aims to explore how representations about the Chinese and religiosity are discussed and constructed in an event of political campaign for Jakarta’s gubernatorial election. Denial of racism and prejudice is not a new phenomenon. However, to the best of my knowledge, analyzing such denial on the basis of religious elements is relatively new.

### **The Categorization of Indigenous - Non-Indigenous and Its Representations in Indonesia**

Indonesians commonly define the Chinese as non-indigenous. Indigenous groups of Indonesia (native Indonesians) refer to cultures, ethnic traditions, and languages originating from a specific place in Indonesia. Indonesia, which consists of five large islands (i.e., Sumatera, Kalimantan, West Papua, Sulawesi, and Java) and thousands of smaller islands, has natives representing the majority of the population. Because Islam is the largest religion, Muslim-indigenous groups tend to dominate and stand out in political and cultural life. Based on a 2000 population census (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003), in general the largest ethnic group in Indonesia is Javanese (around 83.87 million/42.71%) and followed by Sundanese (30.98 million/15.41%). The population of the Chinese is about 1.74 million or about 0.86%. Compared to other ethnicities such as Acehnese, Nias, Sasak, and Ambon, the population of the Chinese is actually higher. It is reported that in 1930 the Chinese was the sixth largest ethnic group, but the fifteenth in 2000. In Jakarta, the Chinese (460 thousand/5.53%) make up the fourth largest ethnic group after Javanese (2.93 million/35.16%), Betawi—the indigenous ethnic group of Jakarta (2.30 million/ 27.65%), and

Sundanese (1.27 million/15.27%). However, because their tradition, culture, and language are perceived to originate from outside of Indonesia, the Chinese are considered as a non-native Indonesian group.

In Indonesia, in places where Muslims are the majority, the use of a “Chinese calling” refers to both the non-indigenous and non-Muslims. When talking about the Chinese, it will always refer to non-Muslim Chinese. If the religion of the Chinese is Islam, usually the Chinese will be attributed as *Cina Islam* (i.e., Muslim-Chinese). However, in places where the composition of Muslims and non-Muslims is equal or Muslims are the minority, the Chinese are simply referred to as non-indigenous, an attribute that is only categorized for the Indonesian Chinese (Betrand, 2004).

Social exclusions toward the Chinese emerged almost in all provinces of Indonesia (Betrand, 2004). Often, the exclusion caused the Chinese to suffer violent attacks (Setiono, 2002). The last major incident related to non-indigenous sentiment occurred in May 1998. The collapse of Indonesian economy in 1997 had caused civil unrest which led to overthrow the regime of Soeharto, who ruled Indonesia for 32 years. Mass riots emerged in several cities on May 13-14, 1998 and took a toll on the Chinese people (Min, 2006; Tay, 2006). On the contrary, most of the stores owned by the indigenous were protected from the incidents by displaying signboards written with “milik pribumi” (owned by indigenous).

However, in 2001, Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur, the 4th President of Indonesia and also known as a prominent Islamic leader, realized that the previous discrimination policies toward the Chinese were unprecedented. In the Gus Dur era, the policies constraining the Chinese tradition were removed and the label of the second class citizen was recalled.

Moreover, because it is considered as a stigma, the “Chinese” calling has been replaced with “Tionghoa.” Despite the inclusion of “Tionghoa” as a regular rule for formal language, in everyday life the Chinese calling is still frequently used (Putra & Pitaloka, 2012). Thus, I expect that a Chinese candidate will face tough challenges from Muslims who still perceive the Chinese in a negative frame.

### **The Setting: Jakarta Election 2012**

Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia, with Islam (85%) as the largest religion followed by Christianity (10%). In 2012, Jakarta held its second direct election for governor and vice governor. One of the candidates, Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi), embraced Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (famously known by his Chinese name, Ahok), who is a non-Muslim Chinese, to be his deputy. Although it was the first time for Jakarta residents to vote for a non-indigenous-Muslim candidate, it was not the first time that a Chinese leads Jakarta. During President Soekarno’s era (1945-1966), a Chinese descendant, Henk Gantung, had been directly appointed as Jakarta governor by the President in 1964 but only lasted for a year when Soekarno was overthrown in September 1965 which caused a regime change from Soekarno’s to Soeharto’s (1966-1998). Nonetheless, after Henk Gantung, Jakarta limited the Chinese involvement in politics. It was not until 2001 that Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), the fourth President of Indonesia, reinstated the possibility of political involvement for the Chinese.

Before the election date, most survey institutes predicted that the incumbent Fauzi Bowo-Nachrowi would hold the top position (Rejeki, 2012). However, the result of the election was both surprising and unpredicted. From four pairs of candidates, Jokowi and Ahok won the most votes during the first round of the election. The competition became

heated and unhealthy in the second round of the election when there were only two pairs of candidates left, the incumbent Fauzi Bowo-Nachrowi versus Jokowi-Ahok<sup>1</sup>.

In this second round of the election, one of the supporters of the incumbent pair, Rhoma Irama (a dangdut singer and a prominent Islamic cleric) asked Muslims not to vote for Ahok, the Chinese candidate. He utilized a mosque as a place to persuade other Muslims and used the Quran's messages to strengthen his rationale for rejection. Irama's sermon, which was delivered in 29 July 2012, sparked a debate on whether or not it was a hate speech.

## Method

### Data Collection

The data collection focused on three events: (1) the moment when Rhoma Irama was delivering his sermon, (2) the moment when Rhoma Irama was summoned to the Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu) to give a clarification about his sermon, and (3) the moment after Rhoma Irama was relieved from allegation of delivering negative sentiments.

Archival data were obtained from open sources data on the internet. Hence, the data can be seen as public behavior through which ethically is acceptable to be scientifically analyzed (see Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). First is Rhoma Irama's sermon (in the extraction will be referred to as RI 1), which was collected from YouTube<sup>2</sup>. Second, I collected a report from Kompas news (2012) regarding Rhoma Irama's objection to accusation against his sermon (in the extraction it will be referred to as RI 2; Retrieved from Afifah, 2012). Third, in order to report the demonstration supporting Rhoma Irama, I collected data from *Rima News* (2012), *twicsy.com* (2012), *merdeka.com* (2012), *vivanews.com* (Affandi, 2012), and *kabarkampus.com* (Sazli, 2012). Fourth, I reported two persons' statements and interview; Abdul Rasyid Abdullah Syafi'i and Saharudin Daming which were obtained from online mass media. I reported Syafi'i as his statement represents the 11 clerics who supported Rhoma Irama (in the extraction it will be referred to as ARAS 1; Retrieved from Ratna, 2012). Saharudin Daming's interview was used to represent one of the many Muslims who work in National Committee of Human Rights (in the extraction it will be referred as SD 1; Retrieved from Hidayat, 2012) and supported Rhoma Irama. All data were collected pertaining to support of Rhoma Irama's rhetoric which state that his religious sermon has nothing to do with negative sentiment. The data were identified and selected for more detailed analysis and discussion.

### Analysis

The tool used for analyzing discourse about religious activities in the middle of gubernatorial campaign was social representations approach (see Elcheroth et al., 2011; Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015). In particular, social representations approach was used to understand the process of world-making representations about the differentiation between hate speech and religious sermon. That is, how a negative sentiment toward a member of an outgroup delivered in a religious sermon is represented as something unrelated to hatred.

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<sup>1</sup> The first re-election was held on 11 July 2012, and the second round of re-election had been held on 20 September 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The sermon was videotaped and uploaded on YouTube. It can be found in YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiYEc2z30mo>. Soon after, the sermon became a fierce public debate on whether or not it contains negative sentiment attacking a certain candidate.

The data, in the form of voice recording of Irama's sermon, were transcribed, so that it can be categorized and managed with other text data. The text data were, then, identified, categorized into themes, and translated.

There were two processes that I would like to understand. First is to understand the social representations of the Chinese as the other and how it was used to attack the Chinese candidate. In this process, I concentrated on analyzing the contents of Rhoma Irama's sermon in how he describes the Chinese candidate which lead to the view that a Chinese is not fit to be a leader of Jakarta.

Second is to understand a construction process of a "new" social representation of how religious teaching is represented to have nothing to do with negative sentiment or hatred. In this process, I used statements from Rhoma Irama and his supporters (see data collection on archival data of second to fourth).

## Results

In this section, I present our analysis results in two discursive themes, which I have titled "Having a Chinese leader is a humiliation" and "Delivering God's words: Obligation has nothing to do with hatred." The first theme focuses on discussing Rhoma Irama's sermon. Here I demonstrate evidence that his sermon contains negative messages. In the second theme, I show Rhoma Irama and his supporters' rhetoric that the sermon contains religious teaching per se.

### Having a Chinese Leader Is a Humiliation

As most native Indonesians are Muslims, a mosque is regarded as a strategic place to deliver propaganda and to persuade other Muslims (see e.g., Moghaddam, 2006, 2008). In the mosque, Quranic verses are exploited to reinforce ideas related to Muslim life. By taking an advantage of his position as a religious figure, Rhoma Irama utilized the mosque to deliver an idea that Islam does not acknowledge a non-Muslim to be a leader for Muslims. In this regard, to strengthen his view, he backed his sermon with a Quranic verse. His sermon in Al Isra Mosque on 29 July 2012 said:

Memilih pemimpin bukan hanya soal politik [...] tapi sudah termasuk ibadah... (lalu membaca ayat dan mengartikannya) Hai orang-orang yang beriman, jangan sekali-sekali kau mengangkat seorang pemimpin dari orang-orang kafir di samping orang-orang yang beriman... Apakah kamu mau membuka peluang bagi Allah untuk menghukum kamu? Ini sanksi kalau kita memilih pemimpin yang non-Muslim [...] kalau kita memilih pemimpin yang non-Muslim maka sanksinya adalah mendapat azab dari Allah SWT. (RI 1)

[Choosing a leader is not about politics [...] but also a spiritual call/devotion... (then he chants a Quran verse and translates it) Let not the believers take the disbelievers as Auliya (supporter, helper, leader, etc) instead of the believers... Do you want Allah to punish you? This is a sanction for us when we choose a non-Muslim leader [...] and whoever does that will receive Allah's punishment. (see Quran: 2; 28 for a complete version of the verse). (RI 1)

The excerpt above is the introduction of Rhoma Irama's sermon. He reminds the audience that choosing a leader is part of devotion where it is clearly explained in the Quran. Using

Quranic verses, he stresses that believers, which refer to Muslims, shall not take a non-Muslim as a leader due to Allah's sanctions and punishment. For information, refusing a non-Muslim to be a leader is not a case found only in Indonesia. A study conducted by Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2004) also shows how Muslims living in the UK used the Quranic verses to reject participating in the 1997 General Election. It can be noted here that there is a notion in some Muslims that having a non-Muslim leader will lead them to a wrong path, that is, ending up doing what is forbidden by Islamic law.

As the sermon continues, Rhoma Irama implies that having a non-Muslim as a leader will create a scourge for Jakarta.

Kalau sudah Ahok yang seorang non pribumi menjadi Gubernur di Jakarta Ibukota Indonesia, martabat bangsa tergadaikan, citra bangsa tercabik-cabik. (RI 1)

[If Ahok who is a non-indigenous becomes a Governor of Jakarta which is the capital city of Indonesia, then the nation's dignity is degraded and ripped apart]. (RI 1)

In the excerpt above, Rhoma Irama describes that Ahok is different than the indigenous Muslims. Here, the word "non-indigenous," referring to Ahok's background, is used to stress that Ahok cannot be treated equally to indigenous groups. That is, his status is considered lower than the indigenous groups. In doing so, Rhoma Irama feels that Ahok will degrade the nation's dignity when he becomes Jakarta's leader. This indicates that the Chinese entities are considered unfit with Indonesian values and characteristics.

Similar cases, where a majority-dominant group degrades minority groups, can also be found in other countries. For example, immigrants in England (see Howarth, 2009) and Black and Jews in Germany (see Holtz & Wagner, 2009) shared the same experience of having been degenerated out from the national identity. It is simply because their values and characteristics are believed to be incompatible with the national identity.

Rhoma Irama continues his arguments, explaining why Muslims should not vote for Ahok.

Kalau sudah seorang Kristen memimpin Ibukota Jakarta, negara yang mayoritas Muslim ini maka umat Islam menanggung aib besar di mata dunia internasional, *Innalillahi*. Saya tahu banyak umat Islam yang mengidolakan Jokowi, saya tahu betul [...] karena memang beliau orangnya, menurut mereka (dia) sabar, santun, ini, itu, idola banget, deh. Tapi inget Jokowi hanya batu loncatan. Yang nanti akan berkuasa adalah Ahok yang non-Muslim, Ahok yang Cina, Ahok yang Kristen, *inalillahi, naudzubillah min dzalik*. (RI 1)

[If a Christian (referring to Ahok's religion) leads the capital city Jakarta which has Muslim as the majority, then followers of Islam bear the disgrace in the eyes of the international world, *Innalillahi* (Arabic word, meaning 'oh, my God'). I know that a lot of Muslims idolize Jokowi, and I know that exactly [...] because he is really the man who is known to be patient and polite, and this is what makes him overwhelmingly idolized. But remember, Jokowi is only a stepping stone. Later, Ahok who is a non-Muslim, who is a Chinese, who is a Christian, will be the real ruler. *Innalilahi, naudzubillah min dzalik* (*Oh my God, we seek refuge in God from that*)]. (RI 1)

In the excerpt above, once again, Rhoma Irama describes how Ahok is different from other indigenous. He emphasizes that Ahok is different not just because he is a Chinese but also as a non-Muslim. In addition, in Indonesia, the word “Innalilahi” is usually used when Muslims get news related to tragedies such as death, car crash, earthquake, etc. In English, “Innalilahi” can be synonymous with “Alas” where it is usually used for expressions of grief, pity, or concern. While “naudzubillah min dzalik” is usually used when a Muslim encounters a bad situation and prays to God to be shunned from that situation. It can be understood here that having a non-Muslim leader in a place where Muslims are the majority will create: (1) a disgrace to the nation, (2) a tragedy for Muslims, and (3) a bad situation for Muslims. Nevertheless, Rhoma Irama also implies that a position as a vice governor is only a stepping stone for Ahok. Here, we assume that Rhoma Irama feels that being a vice governor is not a non-Muslim’s main goal. Vice governor is considered as a stepping stone for Ahok in reaching the true goal, that is, becoming a governor.

In the closing of Rhoma Irama’s sermon, he asks the audience to further deliver his message to all Muslims living in Jakarta in an effort to protect Jakarta from the grip of non-indigenous and non-Muslim. As he said in his closing sermon:

*Mohon hal ini disampaikan kepada semua orang Islam yang tidak hadir di sini, pada saudara kita, tetangga kita, teman-teman kita... Semoga Jakarta dilindungi oleh Allah SWT dari cengkeraman non-pribumi, dari cengkeraman non-Muslim (RI 1)*

[Please convey this to every Muslim who do not attend here, to our relatives, our neighbors, our friends... May Allah protect Jakarta from non-Indigenous grip, and from non-Muslim grip] (RI 1).

In the excerpt above, Rhoma Irama hopes that the audience will convey his message to every Muslims in order to protect Jakarta from non-indigenous and non-Muslims. It is a clear statement from Rhoma Irama that there is no (strategic) place for a non-Muslim in Jakarta. The use of “non-indigenous grip” and “non-Muslim grip” in the sermon may refer to an understanding that Muslim activities will be controlled by a non-Muslim. Hence, Rhoma Irama may think that Muslims will not benefit from voting for Ahok as they will fall into the grip of a non-Muslim.

Overall, based on our analyses, the use of “innalillahi, naudzubillahi mindzalik,” “disgrace to the nation,” “non-indigenous grip,” “non-Muslim grip” are examples of negative sentiments or resentment toward a non-Muslim Chinese contained in the sermon. However, this was denied by Rhoma Irama.

### **Delivering God’s Words: Obligation Has Nothing to Do with Hatred**

In Indonesia, showing negative sentiments and hostility toward a certain ethnic or religious group in public is forbidden. Because of his sermon, which contains rejection of a candidate based on ethnicity and religion, Rhoma Irama was summoned by the Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu) on 1 August 2012 to give a clarification about his sermon. Rhoma Irama was alleged over the hate propaganda against the Chinese candidate (Budiman & Perdana, 2012). About a week after his sermon, on 6 August 2012, Rhoma Irama came to comply with the summon. He stated that he was not guilty because what he did was a religious sermon where the statement of rejecting non-Muslim leader is clearly explained in the Quran.

Rhoma Irama strongly declined the accusation that he had spread hatred toward a certain religion and ethnic group. As reported by Afifah from Kompas News (2012), in the interview on August, 3, 2012, Rhoma Irama states that:

*Saya menyampaikan firman Allah di rumah Allah. Apakah hal itu salah? Saya hanya menyampaikan kebenaran... Jika umat Islam memilih pemimpin yang kafir, maka mereka akan menjadi musuh Allah... Saya yakin kebenaran ayat al-Quran. Jadi saya tidak takut menyampaikannya. Saya wajib menyampaikan kebenaran. Bagaimana jika banyak umat Islam yang menjadi musuh Allah? (RI 2)*

[ I was just delivering God's words in the House of God. Is it wrong? I was just telling the truth... If Muslims choose an infidel (*kufir*) as their leader, they will become the enemies of God... I believe in the truth of the Quranic verses. It is my obligation to deliver the truth. What if many Muslims become the enemies of God?]. (RI 2)

In the excerpt above, according to Rhoma Irama, Ahok is considered as a *kufir* or an infidel. It is important to note here that the word "infidel" was not used by Rhoma Irama in his sermon. Hence, Ahok has another label or attribute other than a Chinese, a Christian, or a non-Muslim, namely as an infidel. The excerpt describes that Rhoma Irama believes that rejection to candidates who are non-Muslim, Christian, Chinese, or infidel has nothing to do with negative sentiment toward a certain group. He has a belief that delivering God's messages in the House of God (i.e., mosque) will relief him from the accusation of propagating negative sentiment.

Moreover, during Rhoma Irama's interrogation in Panwaslu office, due to accusation of his negative sentiment, there was a demonstration rallying outside the building in an attempt to give support to Rhoma Irama (Alvin, 2012; Wibowo, 2012). As reported by Alvin from Centro One news (2012), Wibowo from Tempo news (2012), and Affandi from Viva news (2012), outside the Panwaslu building, hundreds of demonstrators raised banners of various messages in support of Rhoma Irama. At the same time, there were also banners displayed to support Rhoma Irama at some street corners around Jakarta (see Figure 1 as an example).

**Figure 1:** Two banners displayed in the street corners of Jakarta and one banner displayed on the crossing bridge with the picture of Rhoma Irama with the words *jangan teror ustad dan ulama* (Do not terrorize cleric and religious figure) and *jangan sakiti ulama kami* (do not hurt our cleric) (sources retrieved from Sazli, 2012; Rima News, 2012; and twicsy.com, 2012).



As seen in figure 1, 2, and 3, referring to the remarks pointed out by the demonstrators and the statements displayed on the banners, it seems that the main issue being addressed is religion. The rejection, due to the candidate's Chinese ethnicity, was not explicitly addressed. In fact, there were no banners informing that the demonstrators reject Ahok because he is a non-Muslim Chinese. Here, Ahok who is a Chinese, is perceived as the "other" because his religion is different from that of the indigenous majority. Accordingly, such banners, which showed support for Rhoma Irama, highlighted the issue of religion as the main reason for rejecting Ahok. The following statements support the explanation above:

Jangan terror ustad dan Ulama.

[Do not terrorize the clerics and religious figures]

Bang Haji! Maju terus dalam menegakkan agama Allah! Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar!

[*Bang Haji (Rhoma Irama's nickname)! Keep moving in defending Allah's religion! Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar!*]

[...] *Kami siap dibelakang mu hingga tetesan darah terakhir.*

[We will back you until the last drop of blood]

Jangalah orang-orang Mukmin memilih pemimpin yang bukan dari orang-orang mukmin. Barang siapa berbuat demikian Allah SWT tidak akan menolongnya kecuali tidak ada orang-orang mukmin. Allah SWT memperingatkan kamu terhadap siksaanNya karena kepadaNya kamu kembali

[Let not the believers take the disbelievers as Auliya (supporter, helper, leader, etc) instead of the believers, and whoever does that will never be helped by Allah in any way, except if you indeed fear a danger from them. And Allah warns you against Himself (his punishment), and to Allah is the final return]. (Quran: 2; 28)

The messages above indicate that the main issue for refusing Ahok's candidacy as a Vice Governor of Jakarta is due to his non-Muslim identity.

**Figure 2:** Demonstrators display a banner showing the words *Bang Haji! Maju terus dalam menegakkan agama Allah! Allahu Akbar..Allahu akbar* (Bang Haji (Rhoma Irama's nickname)! keep moving in straightening Allah's religion! Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar!) (source retrieved from Affandi, 2012).



**Figure 3:** Demonstrators displaying a banner containing Quranic verses (source retrieved from Bukhori, 2012).



Shortly, after conducting investigations, on 13 August 2012 Panwaslu recalled its charge to Rhoma Irama. They reported that there was no evidence which supported the accusation that Rhoma Irama's sermon spread hatred toward a certain ethnic and religion (Aziza, 2012). For this, Abdul Rasyid Abdullah Syafi'i, on behalf of 11 clerics who supported Rhoma Irama, expressed his gratitude. As reported by Ratna from Islam Pos news (2012), the clerics stated that Rhoma Irama's sermon has nothing to do with any "hidden" political campaigns. According to them, Rhoma Irama was solely explaining the criteria of a leader according to Islamic perspective. Indeed, the clerics demanded Panwaslu to stop accusing clerics of propagating negative sentiments, asserting that propagation is not part of clerics' religious activities. Abdul Rasyid Abdullah Syafi'i clearly states:

*Kami minta Panwaslu DKI tidak menakut-nakuti para ulama, yang memberikan ceramah dengan isu SARA<sup>3</sup>. Ulama dan Habib hanya menyampaikan bagaimana kepemimpinan dalam pandangan Islam, jangan kaitkan dengan SARA" (ARAS 1).*

[We ask Panwaslu DKI to stop frightening clerics with accusation of propagating ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup (abbreviated as SARA in Indonesia language) issues. Clerics and preachers only explain the meaning of leadership in Islamic perspective, so please do not relate this to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup issues] (ARAS 1).

In the excerpt above, Syafi'i implies that accusation of propagating ethnic, religion, race, or intergroup sentiments have scared clerics. Clerics have the duties of delivering religious messages; therefore, sermons delivered by clerics are not related to negative sentiment toward a certain group. In line with the statements from Syafi'i, one member of National

<sup>3</sup> In Indonesia it is called as SARA issue, which is the acronym of *suku* (ethnic), *agama* (religion), *ras* (race), and *antargolongan* (intergroup).

Commission of Human Rights, Saharudin Daming describes that Rhoma Irama's sermon does not contain discriminative messages.

*Mari kita tempatkan segala sesuatu secara proporsional objektif, jelas, dan bebas dari intrik. Harus dilakukan investigasi secara menyeluruh lepas dari berbagai kepentingan dari orang-orang yang sedang bertarung. Bahwa Bang Haji melontarkan pernyataan yang oleh pihak lain merasa sebagai sesuatu yang diskriminatif, saya pikir itu tidak adil. Karena apa yang dilakukan Bang Haji pada konteks keislaman adalah sesuatu yang tidak sekedar menjadi kewajiban bagi dirinya, tapi juga untuk semua umat muslim karena itu adalah petikan ayat dalam Al Qur'an dan diperkuat dalam hadis bahwa kita dalam memilih pemimpin punya kriteria.... Semua kelompok agama apapun pasti juga punya kriteria... Maka ketika Rhoma membuat kriteria pemimpin menurut keyakinannya adalah suatu yang sah dan tidak perlu dipersoalkan. Tapi ketika Rhoma tampil dalam khutbah untuk mengajak pemimpin Islam, apa yang salah? Sebagai pribadi Muslim saya kira kita terikat dengan hal itu, bukan hanya Rhoma... Itu semua adalah bagian dari kebebasan menjalankan ibadah, itu kan dijamin undang-undang. Tentu hal-hal seperti ini harus dibebaskan dari intrik-intrik politik. Rhoma Irama melakukan itu kan tidak sebagai intrik politik, dia hanya menjaga gawang. (SD 1)*

[Let us put everything in proportion, objective, clear and free from intrigue. There has to be a thorough investigation free from interests of the contesting parties. That Bang Haji's remarks is felt by other party as discriminative, I believe it is unfair. Because what Bang Haji did in the context of Islam is not only obligatory to him, rather it also applies to other Muslims because it is an excerpt from the verses in the Qur'an and strengthened in the hadist, that in choosing a leader there are certain criteria... All religious groups also have their own criteria... Thus when Rhoma creates a criteria for a leader according to his belief then it is valid and does not have to be disputed. But when Rhoma appears in his sermon to persuade an Islamic leader, what is so wrong? As a Muslim we are bound by it, not just Rhoma... All of these are part of freedom to worship, it is protected by the law. Of course all of these issues should be free of political intrigue. What Rhoma did is not part of political intrigue, he is acting as a gate keeper.] (SD 1)

In the excerpt above, Daming describes that Rhoma Irama is not guilty in persuading Muslims to vote only for Muslim candidates. It is not wrong for Rhoma Irama to have a leader model derived from his faith. Since Rhoma Irama is a Muslim, he has an obligation to convey, what he believes as the truth. According to Daming, what Rhoma Irama did is part of worship. He argues that other religions will do the same as what Rhoma Irama did. Thus, Daming thinks that it is the right of every religious people to perform their religious worship.

In this section I have reported a process of how a "rhetorical" representation about religion was used to tackle accusation of negative sentiment. It demonstrates a social representation which had not existed socially before it was represented and enacted (Wagner, 1998).

## Discussion

The present study provides evidence that being labeled as the “other” (non-Muslim and non-indigenous), a Chinese is perceived to be unfit to become Jakarta’s leader as he may disgrace the nation. I have tried to reveal that Rhoma Irama’s sermon contains messages with negative sentiment. It can be seen through the use of “disgrace of the nation” and “innalillahi” in his sermon.

The present findings also reveal how delivering religious doctrines are represented to have nothing to do with negative sentiment or hatred toward a certain group. This relatively “new” representation has been popularized and seems to be socially well-constructed by Rhoma Irama and his supporters. By using the Quranic verses to support his argument for rejecting a Chinese candidate, Rhoma Irama could escape from the accusation of spreading a negative sentiment. According to Rhoma Irama, it is not him who rejects non-Muslim leaders but the Quran, and it is his obligation as a Muslim to deliver such rejection. He has, then, considerably succeeded in constructing this new representation. In this regard, we believe that now some Muslims in Indonesia may have a social representation that delivering God’s messages have nothing to do with hatred. As a consequence, this representation may be strongly used by other Muslim politicians as a tool to tackle other non-Muslim opponents.

In social psychology, how obligation is used as a tool to avoid a wrongdoing is not a new phenomenon. In the case of the Jewish holocaust in World War 2, many of the Nazi soldiers who went to trial stated that they did the killings not because of hatred toward the Jews, but because they were just following order (see Milgram, 1974). Following order is a form of obligation for military members, which in the case of the holocaust, the military members used that to try to escape from responsibilities of wrongdoings.

In relation to prejudice issues, denial of racism and using negative comments can be found in many societies around the world in varied forms (Nelson, 2013; van Dijk, 1992). In short, its intention is to avoid, minimize, or defend from being labeled as racist or prejudiced. So far, to the best of my knowledge, such denial of using religious elements is considered a novel phenomenon which has not been reported before. So far, the present study has found that in Indonesia accepting that delivering God’s messages do not relate to negative sentiments have reduced the description for hate speech and prejudice. This in turn has worrying implication in reducing prejudice and intergroup hostilities.

In able to understand how religious teachings cannot be considered to be related to hatred, we have to understand how religion is perceived by Indonesians, in particular among the majority Muslims. Generally, religion is a very important element to Indonesians. This is a key element in being an Indonesian, which is being a person with a belief in God. In Indonesia, religious people are represented as morally good. As I described in the introduction that in common knowledge, often being religious is categorized as being good, or even undeniably saintly. Therefore I expected that this explains why not relating religious sermon to hatred is accepted as reasonable.

In this regard, let us take a look at the study conducted by Billig (2001) about jokes. By analyzing three websites that present racist humours, Billig revealed that the disclaimers from the websites informing that the contents are just a joke are not just a joke. It was described that putting a joke by relating black people to apes cannot be considered as merely a joke because apes in a discourse are often used as symbol for stupidity and backwardness. On this matter, Billig showed that the perception that a joke is always a joke and not related to racism can be used by racists to dehumanize outgroup members without being worried of moral sanctions.

A word that is used in a communication relates to a meaning about a social object. The word “negro” to refer black people in the West countries is meant as an insult

(Philogène, 2001). Today, the use of “negro” is forbidden by law. What is allowed is the use of “African American” which is considered to bring a positive meaning. In relation to Indonesian context, how religion relates to a positive meaning can also be shown in how religious symbols are used by politicians. To look religious, many politicians utilized fashion or clothes linking to images of religious people. For example is a Muslim politician wearing *peci* (Muslim hat). Given these explanations, now we can understand why an idea that religious sermon is not related to hatred can be understood to be reasonable.

In order to alleviate this “negative” representation, I suggest finding an alternative explanation of how religion can be used to confirm hatred. Re-interpretation of religious scriptures can be a useful tool to challenge the arguments that “religion has nothing to do with negative sentiments.” As religious teaching has many interpretations and school of thoughts, I assume that how Muslims should perceive or behave toward other believers have multiple interpretations as well.

Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins’ (2004) study regarding British Muslims’ political activity is a good example in the discussion about non-Muslim leader. It was reported that Muslims living in UK had two main interpretations regarding the 1997 general election. One rejected the election, while others participated. Those who supported the election said that “As Muslims we have a duty to promote what is good and beneficial and try to prevent what is bad and harmful to individuals in society... As citizens of Britain, our duty is the same as our duty as Muslims” (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004, pp. 347-348). He argued that Yusuf (one of the prophet living in Egypt at the time of Pharaoh) “did not wait for the ruler and people to renounce their paganism before acting. He moved swiftly and served the people, fulfilling their essential needs and rescuing them from starvation” (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004, p. 348). Given this illustration, it seems possible to deliver and construct a religious message containing positive description about other groups in Indonesia. I argue that finding and using prominent Islamic leaders in mobilizing tolerant religious messages can make the representations of religious tolerance more effective. In this regard, I suggest further study to focus on how such new social representation or understanding can be accepted and replace the old social representation.

Furthermore, I also propose another way to overcome negative representation toward the Chinese, that is, by deconstructing the shared representation of history (Liu & Hamilton, 2005) narration of Indonesia. In Indonesia, the involvement of the Chinese in building the nation is highly neglected and blurred, where historically the Chinese are considered to have a strong influence (Setiono, 2002). It is important to note here that this is the case for non-Muslim Chinese and not for Muslim Chinese. Usually, Muslim Chinese will be perceived more positively and are accepted by indigenous Muslims. I believe that exposing such national events and cultural life in Indonesia, where the Chinese are perceived to be involved, may create a positive shared representation of history between the Chinese and the indigenous groups.

I assume that when most groups have a common representation about Indonesian history, they will be perceived as part of a common identity. This is possible because history can become a connecting bridge (Liu, Lawrence, Ward, & Abraham, 2002) between collective identities. In doing so, further study need to be conducted in order to understand when and how building a shared representation is feasible and can successfully create a common identity.

Nevertheless, some limitations of the present study need to be addressed. First, the present study concentrated in the sequential events in Jakarta’s gubernatorial election campaign in tackling a non-Muslim Chinese candidate. I do not yet know whether or not such rejection occurs to non-Muslim indigenous. What I can predict is that there will be a negative reaction from the majority groups toward a minority candidate. Second, my study is about

political involvement of a minority group and how their involvement is responded by the majority in Jakarta, Indonesia. As it has been reported, there was a negative response. I assume this negative response is not unique to Indonesia. It is therefore good to know, for example, of what will happen when a Turk is involved as a presidential candidate in European countries or a Chinese involved as a presidential candidate in Australia or in New Zealand? Studying this issue is important in order to find the solution for the minority rejection problems.

In conclusion, this study suggests that when a negative representation of a minority group is found, this negative representation can be a useful tool for politicians. Religious elements can be used to deflect accusation of negative sentiments against a certain group. Religion is socially represented to always relate to something positive or sacred. To the best of my knowledge, this representation only starts to exist after it was enacted and contested in a political election event for Jakarta's Governor in 2012.

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### **Author Note**

Idhamsyah Eka Putra is a lecturer in Psychology Graduate Programs at Persada Indonesia University and a division coordinator for Applied Social Psychology in the center for Police and Terrorism Research at University of Indonesia. He holds a doctoral degree (with distinction) in social psychology from Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Austria. His research interest is in social psychology studying prejudice, (Islamic) terrorism, intergroup relations, social exclusions, and intergroup conflicts. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [idhamsyah.ekaputra@gmail.com](mailto:idhamsyah.ekaputra@gmail.com).

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