

# Challenging a Home Country: A Preliminary Account of Indonesian Student Activism in Berlin, Germany

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This article gives an overview on Indonesian student activism in Berlin, Germany. Based on documents (published and unpublished), interviews, and conversations with former and current student activists, the paper scrutinizes the trajectory of activism of Indonesian students in the capital of Germany since the 1960s and asks about the evolution of specific student organizations, the issues and topics they tackled, and their media and networking strategies. The article illustrates the activities of the PPI Berlin as a dominant example of Indonesian students' political activism abroad and the activities of Indonesian Muslim students as a prominent example of religious-based activism which has gained significance since the fall of Suharto. These examples indicate the diversity of Indonesian student activists in Berlin that are nevertheless united in their aspirations to challenge politics back home.

**Keywords:** Anti-Suharto Protests; Berlin; Indonesian Student Activism; Indonesian Student Associations; Religious-Based Activism

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Dieser Artikel gibt einen Überblick über den Aktivismus indonesischer StudentInnen in Berlin, Deutschland. Anhand von veröffentlichten und unveröffentlichten Dokumenten, Interviews und Gesprächen mit früheren und derzeitigen studentischen AktivistInnen wird die Entwicklung dieses Aktivismus seit den 1960er Jahren untersucht und nach der Entstehung von einzelnen StudentInnenorganisationen, den behandelten Themen sowie den Medien- und Netzwerkstrategien gefragt. Der Artikel zeigt die Aktivitäten der PPI Berlin als Beispiel für politischen Aktivismus von indonesischen StudentInnen im Ausland und die Aktivitäten von indonesischen muslimischen StudentInnen als Beispiel für religionsbasierten Aktivismus, der seit dem Fall von Suharto an Bedeutung gewonnen hat. Diese Beispiele zeigen die Vielfalt von indonesischen studentischen AktivistInnen, die dennoch in ihren Bestrebungen, auf politische Prozesse im Heimatland einzuwirken, vereint sind.

**Schlagworte:** Anti-Suharto Proteste; Berlin; indonesische StudentInnenvereinigungen; indonesischer studentischer Aktivismus; religionsbasierter Aktivismus

## INTRODUCTION

The political position of students (*mahasiswa/i*) in Indonesia has been a determining factor at key junctures since the colonial era. This was most evident in the course of the downfall of Suharto in 1998 (Aspinall, 2005; Botz, 2001, p. 39; Eklof, 2004, p. 297), as Indonesian students not only played a critical role in their home country, but some of them living abroad also contributed remarkably to this change in leadership. Already during Dutch colonial rule, Indonesian student associations in the Netherlands were engaged in struggling for the independence of Indonesia. For instance, Mohammad Hatta through *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (PI, Indonesian Student's League), Syahrir, and many others who studied in the Netherlands were active in persuading the international community to lend their support to the independence of Indonesia (Mrázek, 1994; Rose, 2010).

This paper seeks to highlight the activism of Indonesian students in Berlin from the 1960s until today. In order to do so it poses the following question: How have Indonesian students abroad organized their political activism, built networks, and sustained consistency in order to express their critical stance towards events at home? In particular, the article focuses on Indonesian student activists in Berlin-based campaigns between the 1970s and today: What issues have been preferred, what media used, and what networks established? Finally, this paper also illustrates nuances between the activism of secular student movements and religion-based student activism. The current capital of Germany is the center of this article's analysis since most Indonesian students in Germany, estimated to number perhaps a thousand, currently reside in Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

This study is based on written documents (published and unpublished), interviews and conversations with former and current student activists, and on personal participatory observation with former and current students who lived and studied in Berlin from 2010 to 2013. This set of written material and oral histories allow for a closer insight in the activism of Indonesian students abroad.<sup>2</sup>

### INDONESIAN STUDENT ACTIVISM IN GERMANY UNTIL THE FALL OF SUHARTO

Student activism refers to a series of collective actions outside learning and educational undertakings, which are oriented towards contributing to the change of unjust political, social, and cultural circumstances surrounding them. In many countries, the targets of their opposition are the entrenched, ruling regimes (Weiss, Aspinall, & Thompson, 2012, p. 1). The political and historical position of student activism in the process of social and political change of any country is of utmost importance. In the Republic of China, for example, students in the 1990s spearheaded protest move-

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1 This number is estimated by an informant at the Indonesian Embassy in Berlin. Besides this estimation, the Indonesian Embassy cannot provide accurate figures.

2 For the literature review, I have benefited from the closer study of bulletins, booklets, and magazines of student organizations which remain preserved by Pipit Rochijart Kartawidjaja in a private collection. He is a former prominent activist of the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) and one of the founders of *Watch Indonesia!*.

ments against the authoritarian ruling regime, while in Indonesia, student demonstrations successfully forced Suharto to step down from presidency in 1998 (Aspinall, 2005; Eklof, 2004; Vatikiotis, 1994; Wright, 2001). Similar to the student movements in their home country, Indonesian student activists in Berlin remained focused on and critical of the politics in their home country. This section highlights the activism of Indonesian students in Berlin, Germany, between the 1970s and the fall of Suharto in 1998. Prior to this, especially in the post-colonial era of Indonesia, many student organizations were established abroad, but their activism did not have any discernible impact on the domestic politics of their home country.

The information regarding the first Indonesian students who arrived in Berlin is both scarce and not particularly clear; several names have been mentioned as the early generation of Indonesian students who came to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1960s. Regardless, there certainly was an Indonesian student presence in the GDR, most of whom were sympathetic to the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party), such as Soebronto K. Atmodjo (1929–1982) (Ardjo, 2012, p. 437; Baets, 2002, p. 280). In the Sukarno era, Atmodjo was sent to East Berlin by the government of Indonesia to study music. In 1965, he completed his studies at Hanns Eisler Advanced Music School, Department of Choral Music and Art Ensembles (Ardjo, 2012, p. 438). Xing Hu Kuo was reported as one of the first Chinese-Indonesian students who came to the GDR; yet he was anti-communist (Slobodian, 2013). Mas Prasetyo Soeharto, who was buried in the front yard of the Sehitlik Mosque in Berlin in 1957, can also be regarded as one of the first Indonesian students in Germany.

By the mid-1960s, there were some 70 Indonesian students in the GDR. During the Sukarno era (1945–1965), Indonesia had a closer alliance with the GDR than with the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany) (Slobodian, 2013, p. 38). Sending Indonesian students to the Soviet Union, China, East Germany, Cuba, and many other countries was part of his strategy to collaborate with socialist and communist countries and promote NASAKOM (*nasionalisme* [nationalism], *agama* [religion], *komunisme* [communism]) at home (Hill, 2012; Lamoureux, 2003, p. 100; Westad, 2005). To underscore this, in 1965 Subandrio (the leftist foreign minister of Sukarno's cabinet) refused to issue permits for 13 Indonesian students to travel to the US (Murphy & Welsh, 2008, p. 15).

The *Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia* (PPI, Indonesian Student Association) was established in 1954 in West Germany. At that time, PPI was an association of Indonesian students in both East and West Germany tied with the sentiment of Indonesian nationalism. As an umbrella group for Indonesian student organizations in Germany, the Central PPI (*PPI Pusat*) functioned as a coordinator of the PPI branches established by Indonesian students throughout GDR and FRG. In addition to the PPI, *Organisasi Pelajar Indonesia* (OPI, Indonesian Student Organization) was established in East Germany in the 1970s. This organization was not established to replace or counter the PPI and it eventually existed only in East Germany, functioning as an umbrella organization for student activism parallel to the PPI. In its early days, PPI was not concerned with social and political criticism. Rather, it worked closely with the Representatives of the Indonesian Government in both FRG and GDR. Yet, in the 1970s it changed its legal status from being based upon Indonesian law to becoming an *eingetragener Verein* (e.V.) (registered association) under German law (informant,

personal communication, 1 July 2014). Although PPI was considered to be an entirely independent student organization, from that time on it began to take a more critical stance towards Indonesian politics. This happened at the same time as the first critical comments against Suharto began to be put forward by student activists at home. A turning point was the *Malari* incident of 15 January 1974 (*Malapetaka Lima Belas Januari*, Fifteenth of January Tragedy) – a big demonstration against Suharto's policy of providing more benefits to the economic interest of Japan than to Indonesia (Hidayat, 2008, p. 47; Widjojo & Noorsalim, 2004, p. 60). Three years later, in 1977, the PPI *Cabang Berlin Barat* (Cabe, West Berlin Chapter; in Indonesian language *cabe* means hot chili peppers), one of the local branches of Central PPI, started its critical activism. Although there is no direct link between the Malari incident and the beginning of Indonesian student activism in Berlin, both shared a critique of the ruling Suharto regime. One of the first signs of Indonesian student opposition in Berlin was their refusal to attend the Indonesian Consulate of West Berlin's commemoration of *Kesaktian Pancasila* (Day of Pancasila's Victory).<sup>3</sup> *Kesaktian Pancasila* is a public holiday set by Suharto to commemorate the defeat of the PKI in 1965. Suharto introduced the day as a symbol of devotion to the generals who became victims of the aborted coup on 1 October 1965, allegedly driven by the PKI (Cribb, 2005, p. 34). This rejection led the Consulate Office to speculate that the branch of PPI supported the ideological stance of Indonesian Communist and Sukarnoist groups in Berlin (Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, personal communication, July 2014). Although the board members of PPI Pusat seemed to disagree with the position of its West Berlin branch, they did not have the right to interfere, since PPI Berlin profited from institutional autonomy. The Indonesian General Consulate was concerned with this matter since any indication of communism was considered a threat to the stability of Indonesian politics abroad. Meanwhile, Indonesian Communist and Sukarnoist groups (alumni of *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI, or Indonesian National Party) did not confirm any shared activities with the PPI Berlin. The former were mostly cadres of PKI and Sukarnoists who came from communist-socialist countries in the Soviet Union and from China after obtaining political asylum from FRG. They assumed that the members of the PPI Berlin were not revolutionary enough for them to fight against the Suharto regime. The situation put the Indonesian Student Association of West Berlin in a difficult position. In short, its refusal to attend the *Kesaktian Pancasila* commemoration was a means of showing its opposition to the repressive politics of the Suharto regime, but not to Indonesia itself. It was a sign of an active concern of members of PPI with the daily politics of Indonesia, although they lived in Germany (Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, personal communication, 20 May 2014).

From this incident onwards, the relationship between the Consulate Office of Indonesia and the Indonesian Student Association began to deteriorate. The Consulate had two opponents at the time: Indonesian Communist and Sukarnoist groups, on the one side, and the PPI Berlin, on the other. Although Indonesian Communist groups in Berlin never clearly declared their ideological stance in front of the Indonesian public, their tendency towards communism and socialism could be recognized

3 Pancasila represents the ideological foundation of independent Indonesia set out in the Constitution and consists of five pillars: (1) union of God, (2) humanity, (3) unity of Indonesia, (4) social justice, and (5) democracy (Darmaputera, 1988; Intan, 2006; Ramage, 2005).

from their favorable discussions of Marxism, Stalinism, Leninism, and Maoism and from the back-up of communist and socialist parties such as the *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* (DKP) and *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED) (Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, personal communication, 19 July 2014).

In reaction to the critical stance of the PPI Berlin, the Consulate attempted to intimidate some core Indonesian student activists by pressuring them over their Indonesian citizenship. The Consulate did not revoke their citizenship since this would be a move against human rights laws, yet it delayed and even refused to issue passport extension (or renewal). Without a valid passport, Indonesian student activists were not eligible for extension of their student visas from West German authorities. Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja was one former Indonesian student activist targeted by this intimidation. This strategy, however, did not reduce the criticism of Indonesian students of the official representative of Indonesia in Germany.

Years later, a similar intimidation strategy was directed at Ivan Al-Hadar, a core activist of *Persatuan Pemuda Muslim di Eropah* (PPME, Association of Muslim Students in Europe) and a PhD student at Technische Universität (TU) Berlin. In 1992, the Suharto regime prevented him from going back to West Germany after a long fieldwork period from 1989 to 1992 in Indonesia. During his fieldwork, Al-Hadar was summoned by the *Badan Koordinasi Intelijen Negara* (BAKIN, State Intelligence Coordination Agency) for interrogation regarding his and his student friends' activities in Berlin. It seemed that BAKIN was afraid that Ivan Al-Hadar had used his PhD fieldwork to consolidate support for the Indonesian student movement in West Berlin, assuming that the issue of PPI Berlin's resistance against Suharto had been heard by pro-democracy activists in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

However, BAKIN's efforts to intimidate Kartawidjaja and Ivan Al-Hadar were not successful. Instead of acquiescing, PPI Berlin increased its resistance against the Suharto regime. In fact, they not only opposed the regime but also adopted a strategy of counter-intimidation by creating activities that irritated the personnel of the Indonesian Consulate Office in West Berlin. In the 1980s, for instance, PPI Berlin published and circulated its own internal magazine called *Gotong Royong* (mutual aid). This magazine was funded with their own money to indicate its independence from any intervention. In addition, Kartawidjaja regularly wrote a personal note that contained gossip and rumors happening among home and local staff of the Consulate. These notes were partly published in *Berita Tanpa Sensor* (News Without Censorship) in 1984.<sup>5</sup> Some of the staff were not happy to see how they were mentioned in Kartawidjaja's diary and staged a sort of a public tribunal against him. They forced him to burn the manuscript of the diary. Although the confrontation with the Indonesian Consulate and the Embassy of Indonesia were evocative of the story of "David

4 For example, Abdurrahman Wahid (General Chairman of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and Indonesian president from 1999 to 2001), Emha Ainun Nadjid (artist and poet), and Adnan Buyung Nasution (human rights defender and lawyer) often met and shared experiences either when they visited Berlin or when PPI Berlin activists were going home to Indonesia. Emha Ainun Nadjid lived in Berlin and Amsterdam for eight months in the 1980s. According to him, the activity of PPI Berlin grew popular among the pro-democracy activists of Indonesia.

5 This diary was not published in the form of a bound book, but printed on photocopiers. Some members of PPI Berlin participated in circulating the diary among the Indonesian public in Berlin. I got this information from Asep Ruhiyat and Rolf Susilo during my stay in Berlin from 2009 to 2014.

against Goliath”, as Kartawidjaja puts it, the activists of the student association never despaired.

### SCHOLARLY POLITICS

In anticipation of the criticism from Indonesian students throughout Europe, ‘scholarly politics’ (*politik ilmiah*) was introduced as a guiding principle in the cadres of PPI. As a student organization, PPI was supposed to be independent from the intervention of the ruling regime in Indonesia. However, many of the leadership’s members were close to the state. Consequently, the imposition of state intrusion happened mostly through its leadership. Scholarly politics was introduced by Daud Joesoef who had studied in Paris, France, in the 1970s. The jargon was intended to motivate Indonesian students abroad to focus on their studies and to keep distance from political activism. Engagement in political activism, in Joesoef’s words, led students into non-academic activities, which were against the original intention of their presence abroad. Besides, politics was deemed a “bad” engagement in disharmony, conflict, and immorality. Interestingly, during his period as Minister of National Education and Culture in Indonesia, from 1978 to 1983, Joesoef introduced scholarly politics at campuses at home through his policy called NKK/BKK (*Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus/Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan*, Normalization of Campus Life/Bodies for Student Coordination). Similar to the idea of scholarly politics for Indonesian students abroad, the spirit of the NKK/BKK aimed to depoliticize the role of Indonesian students at home (Aspinall, 2005, p. 120; Machmudi, 2008, p. 109).

In the context of the PPI in Germany, this idea of scholarly politics received various responses from Indonesian students. The PPI Pusat in West Germany generally agreed with the idea. They brought forward the argument that many Indonesian students failed their studies because they were too involved in political activism. This assumption, however, is not totally accurate since many of them dropped out of their studies due to job opportunities in a Western country and to earn money, sufficient not only for their own expenses, but also for their families at home. PPI Berlin, on the contrary, challenged the idea of scholarly politics, as it would lead to ignorance and antipathy towards politics at home or in general. The concept tended to be ‘pro-status quo’ and facilitated control by the regime.

Like PPI Berlin, the Catholic students who formed *Keluarga Mahasiswa Katholik Indonesia* (KMKI, Indonesian Community of Catholic Students) as well as Indonesian Muslim students in Germany opposed scholarly politics.

### MEDIA AND NETWORKING

The success of PPI Berlin in its activism in the 1970s was mainly due to its awareness of the importance of media and networking. Since their inception, the media was regarded as an important tool and strategy to promote their ideas and their struggles. It published *Gotong Royong*, a regular bulletin that reported news, articles, and also featured translated articles from either German or English into Indonesian. The bulletin had quite a significant readership (a circulation of 200 to 300 exemplars of each edition) compared to an estimated 700 Indonesian students living in Berlin

back then (Sembering, former Indonesian student activist, personal communication, 9 July 2014). From the 1970s to the 1990s, reading Indonesian newspapers was a privilege, limited to the staff of the Indonesian Consulate that regularly received supplies from Garuda Indonesian Airways.

Besides a bulletin, the establishment of a network of local activists in Berlin and West Germany is worth mentioning here. As a result, in 1991, the former activists of PPI and local activists agreed to establish the NGO Watch Indonesia!. The tragedy of Santa Cruz, East Timor, that resulted in the death of 290 civilian East Timorese on 12 November 1991 (Gunn, 1997, pp. 126–127; Lawson, 1996, pp. 782–783) was a major reason for the establishment of the NGO.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 inspired the spirit of liberation for the Indonesian community in Berlin. Watch Indonesia! became a bridge between PPI Berlin and German activists. The establishment of Watch Indonesia! can therefore be regarded as evidence of the failure of the “politics of isolation” (*politik isolasi*) conducted by the Indonesian Consulate. The politics of isolation intended to create a public discourse or image that political activism was ‘bad’ for Indonesian students abroad. The involvement of senior activists of PPI Berlin in the formation of Watch Indonesia! presented a response to the politics of isolation as it indicated the ability to extend their activism to German citizens. According to Kartawidjaja, the politics of isolation led the PPI Berlin to interact even more intensively with local NGOs.

### PROTESTING AGAINST SUHARTO IN GERMANY

In 1995, Indonesia was a Hannover Industrial Fair partner country and Suharto used this opportunity to visit Dresden. This was not Suharto’s first visit to Germany. Already in 1991, the President was greeted by demonstrations organized by those who would found Watch Indonesia! and other Indonesian student activists in Berlin who protested against his government’s policies, particularly towards East Timor.

Although the demonstration against the 1995 visit of President Suharto was not big in scale (attended only by 150 to 200 protestors, mostly Germans and a few Indonesians), it had an impact on the political position of the authoritarian leader at home and the eventual degradation of his image as a strong and charismatic leader in both domestic and foreign politics. This was evident in the way the domestic politics of Indonesia responded to this event, and in how East Timor’s independence movement, and also labor activists, used this degradation to strengthen their activism (Elson, 2001, p. 277).

Many speculated that PPI Berlin was an important actor behind the protest. Yet, there is no direct evidence for its involvement but the spirit of opposition against the Suharto regime. One assumed link between the Dresden incident and PPI Berlin was the arrival of Sri-Bintang Pamungkas to Berlin, which coincided with Suharto’s visit to Hannover. Sri-Bintang Pamungkas was a public intellectual and an opposition figure to the Suharto regime. He was elected Member of Parliament (DPR) for

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6 Prior to the establishment of Watch Indonesia!, Indonesian and German students together with other interested citizens formed the *Deutsch-Indonesische Gesellschaft* (DIG); yet, this institution was focused on culture and art rather than on political issues.

the Muslim-based *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP, United Development Party).<sup>7</sup> Sri-Bintang Pamungkas spoke out critically with regard to the authoritarian regime. In particular, he criticized the concept of “development economy” (*ekonomi pembangunan*). Until then, this concept was seen as a trademark of the New Order regime and praised by national and international institutions (like the World Bank) alike. The idea was to counter *ekonomi pembangunan* – celebrated by Suharto’s crony companies and then Minister for Research and Technology, B. J. Habibie – with a critical point of view.

Sri-Bintang Pamungkas came to Germany on invitation by a coalition of international human rights institutions based in West Germany, including Watch Indonesia!. Human rights and democracy activists, such as Yeni Rosa Damayanti,<sup>8</sup> were also invited. After finishing his program in Bonn, Sri-Bintang Pamungkas returned to Berlin to give a lecture on the progress of Indonesian politics at the TU Berlin on 9 April 1995. The lecture was a regular activity organized by PPI Berlin that had hosted other Indonesian speakers such as Adnan Buyung Nasution (lawyer and human rights advocate), W. S. Rendra (poet), and many other Indonesian ‘national figures’ before.

In the context of Sri-Bintang’s visit and the demonstration mentioned above, PPI Berlin had no intention to connect the two events, since the protests took place before the lecture of Sri-Bintang. The Dresden protest was set up by *Timor und Kein Trupp*, an NGO of former East German activists that fought against any kind of authoritarian regimes in the world and had also been participating in toppling the dictatorial regime in East Germany.

The incident curbed the pro-democracy protest movements of Indonesian activists, which had largely stagnated during the New Order. Suharto tried to criminalize all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the protests. On his way home from Germany, he spoke to journalists claiming that all those involved in the demonstration against him were a group of insane people (*orang sinting*). Sri-Bintang Pamungkas was a possible target of prosecution, although there was no evidence at all connecting his lecture at PPI Berlin’s forum to the incident (Elson, 2001, p. 277; Prasetyo & Hasibuan, 1996, p. 33). Nevertheless, the Jakarta Central Court found him guilty of inciting hate speech in his lecture. The court charged Sri-Bintang Pamungkas under a regulation that forbids insulting the President of Indonesia. The government accused him and Indonesian student activists of masterminding the Dresden demonstration against Suharto. Furthermore, Suharto called for a dismissal of Pamungkas’ mandate in parliament. While it was believed that PPP had no right to recall an elected MP, the leadership felt that it had no other choice. As a result, the PPI Berlin received wide coverage in Indonesian media. In short, although there was no direct connection between PPI Berlin and the Dresden incident, this event formed

7 PPP was the result of a forced unification of several smaller political parties oriented towards Islam and one of three legal political parties under Suharto’s dictatorship (Ziegenhain, 2008, p. 52). The role of PPP and *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* (PDI, Indonesian Democratic Party) was comparable to “rubber stamp parties” (*Blockflöten-Parteien*) in the GDR: Their function was to legitimize the policy of Suharto and the ruling party Golkar (*Partai Golongan Karya*, Party of the Functional Groups).

8 Damayanti was an activist of PIJAR (The Center for Information and Reform Action Network), one of the prominent Indonesian NGOs critical of the Suharto leadership. She went to study at the Institute of Social Sciences in the Netherlands and continued her criticism against the undemocratic regime in Indonesia from abroad.

an apparent link in the minds of many, and in turn influenced protest movements at home (Pamungkas, 2008).

### THE EMERGENCE OF MUSLIM STUDENT ACTIVISM

As mentioned above, not all Indonesian students in Berlin were affiliated with PPI Berlin. In 1973, Indonesian Muslim students established the PPME (Muslim Youth Association in Europe) in Germany.<sup>9</sup> The organization was a reincarnation of KII (Indonesian Islamic Family Association), which was established as a response to the establishment of KMKI. In addition, the founding of this Muslim youth association was stimulated by emerging identity politics of the Indonesian community in Berlin at the time. Internationally speaking, it also merged with the spirit of global Islamic revivalism, for instance in Egypt and Iran. From Egypt, it took the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood and from Iran, it took the spirit of the Iranian revolution (Ivan Al-Hadar, personal communication, 23 September 2014, Jakarta).

Although it referred to Islam as an ideological foundation, the youth organization also involved some members of other student associations. Ivan Al-Hadar, for instance, was both an active member of PPME and a core activist of PPI Berlin (1973–1989). Not surprisingly then, the relationship between the two organizations was relatively harmonious at the time, with different roles at the beginning. Whereas the PPI was active in mobilizing political and critical activism, the PPME Berlin focused on providing services to Indonesian Muslim students such as finding a place for Friday prayers, celebrating Islamic festivities, and many other religious activities. Differences between them arose when PPME showed its radical Islamic outlook in public, for instance, regarding the position of women. In 1985, this disagreement became evident when PPI Berlin commemorated the Indonesian women's day with a focus on the Indonesian female 'hero' Kartini. The PPME opposed the celebration with reference to Islam, as the female students at the event were dressed without covering their *'awra/aurat'* (Arabic term for the part of the female body that must be covered in Islam, excluding the face and hands). This opposition showed PPME's stance, which was primarily based on the conventional opinion of Muslim jurists among the four schools of Islamic law (Hanafī, Mālik, Shāfi'ī, and Ibn Hanbal). Its conservative religious tendencies, however, did not stop there, but continued in the daily activities of their members such as in Islamic study groups (*pengajian*) in which women were segregated from men. Abdurrahman Wahid (General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, 1984–1999), for instance, had a disturbing experience with PPME that invited him to give an Islamic sermon at a conference on Islam in Berlin in 1987. Wahid came to the forum and witnessed that the audience was separated in a male and female group through a partition. Wahid opposed this segregation and suggested them to

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9 PPME was first established in the Netherlands in 1971. The use of the word Europe was envisioned to dissociate the organization from Indonesia and therefore avoid trouble with the Indonesian Consulate. The founders of PPME were Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Tengku Razali, Muhammad Chaeron, A. Hanbali Maksum, Abdul Muis Kaderi, Rais Mustafa, and Moh. Sayuti Suaib. Conservative tendencies of the PPME appeared when it started to collaborate with the World Assembly Muslim Youth (WAMY), the Muslim World League (*Rabita al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*), and the Council of Indonesian Islamic Propagation (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*, established by Mohammad Natsir, leader of *Masyumi Party*) (Chabibi, 2011).

dismantle it. When they refused his demand, Wahid left the forum (Pipit Rochijat Kartawijaja, personal communication, 19 July 2014).

The conflict intensified when the PPME accused student activists of PPI Berlin of being secularists and communist sympathizers. At this point, PPME was closer to the anti-communist viewpoint of the Indonesian Consulate. With regard to religious orientation, the PPME was dominated by Muslim student activists inclined towards Salafism (the idea of going back to the practice of the first Muslim generations, see also Chaplin, this issue). PPME often hosted Indonesian Salafi or Muslim Brotherhood preachers (Arabic: *muballigh*) commissioned from Saudi Arabia or Egypt for proselytization (*da'wa*) in Berlin.

Although the PPME claimed it was an Islamic student association, its commitment to Islamic solidarity at home was questioned by other Indonesian students in Berlin at the time. This skepticism was related to PPME's reaction to the Tanjung Priok tragedy, which took place in Jakarta. In 1984, the struggle of Muslim groups for the use of Islam as the sole ideology of Indonesia (*asas tunggal*) led the Indonesian military to commit mass murder in the area of Tanjung Priok, in the north of Jakarta (Muluk, 2009, p. 106). It was not clear why the association did not issue a solidarity statement as the PPI Berlin did.

#### POST-SUHARTO STUDENT POLITICS IN BERLIN

After the resignation of Suharto, the activism of both PPI Berlin and the Central PPI dramatically declined. They assumed that the resignation of Suharto in 1998 would improve politics in Indonesia, especially in terms of democracy and social justice. They also believed that elected leaders – executive and parliament – in the post-Suharto era would assist in this. In fact, the election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President of Indonesia for the period from 2000 to 2001 gave rise to a slight sense of optimism among the students. Wahid announced to amend the *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara* (MPRS, Transitional Indonesian People Assembly) XXV/1966 Decree, which had been a main source of political injustice and discrimination of Indonesian citizens, especially for those who adhered to non-mainstream ideologies such as communism. The amendment of the law became an important starting point to promote reconciliation across the political spectrum in Indonesia. For Indonesians abroad, the amendment was especially important as those who were sent to study abroad by Sukarno regained their citizenship. Although Wahid's plan received criticism from political parties such as Golkar and some Islamic parties in Indonesia, the international community and Indonesian diaspora responded very positively to it. Of course, from the perspective of PPI Berlin, this plan was in line with one of their key struggles. After a controversy, Wahid had to resign from his presidency in 2001, and the agenda of amending the decree was not an urgent issue for his successor, Megawati Sukarnoputri (Susanto, 2007, p. 70).

At the same time, the activism of Indonesian Muslim student groups abroad began to evolve and increase. In Berlin, their activism was mostly concentrated at the al-Falah Mosque. The mosque was founded by the Indonesian Muslim community in Berlin and Brandenburg as a cultural center (IWKZ, *Indonesisches Weisheits- und Kulturzentrum*); however, the PPME played a pioneering role. Before the establishment

of the al-Falah Mosque, Islamic activities were concentrated around the Indonesian Embassy. The IWKZ itself was a center for cultural activity that was not officially intended to be used as a mosque. Because of difficulties in acquiring a building space for an independent mosque in Germany in terms of regulation, location, and financial resources, the Indonesian Muslim community in Berlin agreed with the Embassy to repurpose the IWKZ to a mosque.

The existence of al-Falah in Berlin created a flexible space for Indonesian Muslim students to organize and plan their activities such as weekly Qur'an lessons or *Majelis Taklim* for adult Muslims. The community of al-Falah can be roughly divided into two groups. The first comprises activist members who take part in the routine activities of the mosque whereas the second encompasses ordinary visitors of the mosque. The majority of the first group has a religious mindset close to the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and/or Salafism. Politically, most of them are affiliated with or at least sympathetic to *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party).<sup>10</sup> PKS regularly sends an Islamic preacher from Indonesia to deliver sermons to the Indonesian Muslim community in Germany. These visits are hosted by the al-Falah Mosque in Berlin. The second group comprises those who attend the mosque mainly for Friday prayers. They do not have strong ties with the agenda of the mosque but go there because it is the only mosque administered by the Indonesian community in Berlin. While the first group is smaller than the second one, it is able to dominate the activities because of the intense role in the management of the mosque. Informants assured me that the board of al-Falah is significantly dominated by activists from PKS.

The first group's tendency to support the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood is demonstrated by its adoption of an Islamic learning system for their activists and members. They employ a cell system (Arabic: *usra*, or family), within which the members are divided into several smaller groups ranging from senior to junior strata. Each group is maintained by a senior mentor (Arabic: *murabbi*). The different groups are separated from each other, i.e. juniors sit with juniors and seniors with other seniors. There is a strong sense of solidarity among members, what Mandaville (2007, p. 271) would call a micro-mobilization movement. Although this system is covertly organized, many people know about its activities. In addition, some of those who drop out from the circle have publicly criticized the system, especially through social media like Facebook and Twitter. Indonesian students in Berlin occasionally hear about these activities, but understand them as standard Islamic learning activities, not related to the cultivation of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology.

In addition, Indonesian Muslim students have also organized an Islamic learning forum called *Forum Komunikasi Masyarakat Muslim Indonesia Se-Jerman* (FORKOM, Communication Forum of the Indonesian Muslim Community in Germany). Although this organization is not intended exclusively as a forum for Muslim students, the majority of its members are students. Ideologically speaking, the members of FORKOM also tend to be close to the religious model of the Muslim Brotherhood and/or Salafism and most of its members are indeed members of the PKS. The forum

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10 The PKS is an Indonesian Islamist political party that has a similar vision with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Based on its activities and programs, the party seeks to establish Sharia Law in Indonesia and has a very prominent presence among Indonesian Muslim students in Berlin. In the 2014 general election, the PKS won 35 percent of the vote in Berlin (Aziz, 2014).

has a very strong presence in Berlin, Hannover, Frankfurt, and other big cities in Germany. It sponsors not only religious learning activities but also sports festivals, similar to PPI. Importantly, FORKOM organizes almsgiving for Indonesian Muslims living in Germany. The sports festival is held every year and all the participants are required to wear clothing in accordance with Sharia norms.

Further evidence that suggests FORKOM and al-Falah's support for PKS can be seen in their promotion of the party's program through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. During the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2012, they campaigned actively for the PKS-backed candidate pairing of Hidayat Nur Wahid and Didik J. Rahbini. Hidayat Nur Wahid is a senior politician of PKS and former spokesperson of the Indonesian People Assembly (MPR) and Rahbini is a senior politician of *Partai Amanat Nasional* (PAN, National Mandate Party). When both candidates failed to advance to the second round of the election, they shifted their support to Fauzi Bowo and Nachrowi and launched a negative campaign via social media against the eventual winners, Joko Widodo (the current, newly elected President of Indonesia) and Basuki Cahya Purnama.

Religious activism among Indonesian Muslim students became more vibrant in Berlin when in April 2010, a number of Nahdlatul Ulama students coming from Indonesia to Germany established *Pengurus Cabang Istimewa Nahdlatul Ulama* (PCINU, Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama, Germany). PCINU focuses on organizing religious meetings and providing online and offline religious learning and public discussions for Indonesian Muslim students. Interestingly, both Muslim and non-Muslim students participate in PCINU activities. The presence of the special chapter of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization in Germany provides an alternative space for those Indonesian Muslim students who have a different point of view from the conservative Islamic groups.

In addition, after a lengthy slumber, the activism of the PPI was re-energized by a collaborative demonstration involving PPI Berlin, PCINU, and Watch Indonesia! during the visit of Indonesian parliamentarians to Germany on 26 April 2012. The demonstration received serious attention from prominent political figures in both the Indonesian Consulate in Berlin and back home. The protest was triggered by a rumor that a group from the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (DPR, legislators of Indonesia) would visit Germany and hold a special session organized with the Embassy of Indonesia and the Indonesian community in Berlin. This meeting was 'dressed up' by the Embassy as part of the commemoration of Kartini Day. In response, some Indonesian student activists decided to attend the commemoration and conduct a protest, citing the legislators' visit as a misuse of public funds. As the Embassy of Indonesia was not aware of the plan, members of the abovementioned organizations found it easy to attend the commemoration. Once there, they brought up three important issues: First, to remind the legislators of their function as one of the democratic pillars of the country; second, to remind them of the need for a sense of urgency in their work; and third, calling on them to reduce overseas visits as they consume large amounts of funding but have little benefit at home. The activity gained wide media coverage in Indonesia because it was the first of its kind performed inside an Indonesian Embassy. Every major national media outlet – print and electronic – covered the incident as a means to stimulate public debate on the function of the DPR and the importance

of monitoring the use of public funds. As a result of this pressure, the DPR finally decided to reduce the frequency of members conducting trips abroad (“DPR pelesir”, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

This paper pointed out that Indonesian student activism in Germany comprises a diverse, dynamic, but also controversial interplay of voices. While PPI remains active, it is no longer the sole and central actor among Indonesian students in the country. PPI Berlin and Central PPI continue to focus their activism on issues of human rights and politics, but newer groups such as FORKOM have introduced more puritanical religious activism. Muslim students who associate with the PKS have a different way of performing their activism than students with the PPI Berlin. Relations between current student activists and alumni of both PPI and Muslim students are maintained and sustained, ensuring a basic thread of continuity across time. This is provided by a number of former student activists deciding to stay in Berlin beyond their studies. Furthermore, although there are differences among activist elements, there is a shared desire to critically discuss the situation back home and express and share different views. The PPI hopes its home country will evolve as an open and pluralist country whereas Indonesian Islamic students grouped under FORKOM and the PKS want Indonesia to become a more Islamized country. Since the resignation of Suharto, both groups appear freely in the German public sphere. Indonesian student activists understand dynamic engagement with (political) activism as part of their way in paving the way to the future. Therefore, although they know that their activism may produce unpleasant consequences for themselves, they continue their informed and active engagement and concern.



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