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Indonesia's Islamic Networks in Germany: The Nahdlatul Ulama in Campaigning Islam Nusantara and Enacting Religious Agency

YANWAR PRIBADI 

Abstract

This article discusses Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama (the NU), in campaigning Islam Nusantara, the NU's version of moderate Islam, and enacting religious agency in Germany. The NU has expanded its networks by establishing special branches (PCI NU) across the globe. In Germany, the special branch was established in 2011. This paper specifically investigates organizational projects, religious practices of the NU people, and the campaign of moderate Indonesian Islam. My analysis of the results of ethnographic fieldwork consisting of in-depth interviews, casual chats, and hang-outs in the organization's meetings and gatherings in Germany and Indonesia shows that PCI NU Germany is extending its transnational networks, claiming its religious agency, and strengthening its version of moderate Islam overseas in an effort to make its voices heard within Islamic communities and broader public in the host country and maintain socio-religious connections with the home country.

Keywords: *The Nahdlatul Ulama (the NU); Indonesian Islam; Islam Nusantara; Germany; religious agency; religious identity*

1. Introduction

As Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama (the NU) has expanded its territorial extent and networks by establishing its special branches (Pengurus Cabang Istimewa NU—PCI NU) across the globe. In Germany, the special branch was established in 2011. This special branch was initially founded, organized, managed, and led largely by Indonesian students pursuing the MA and PhD degrees. Gradually, however, many non-student Indonesian diaspora who have long resided in the country have also taken part and significantly influenced the organization. Started after the fall of the Indonesian authoritarian New Order administration (1966–1998) under the command of President Suharto (d. 2008), the overseas NU followers (*nahdliyin*) began to establish informal forums to practice NU religious rituals. In a gradual way, these forums transformed into special branches of the NU. The special branches of the NU in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom are the pioneers of the expansion of the NU worldwide in late 1990s and early 2000s.¹

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¹ Founded on 31 January 1926 in Surabaya, Dutch East Indies, by a number of renowned Islamic religious leaders/teachers (known in Indonesia as *kiai*), the NU is a traditionalist Sunni Islam organization. It is by far the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, with approximately forty to fifty million followers.² It is in fact often said that the NU is probably the world's largest Islamic organization.³ The NU sees its function as being the guardian of sacred tradition by maintaining the four schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence (*madhab*), although it is the Shafi'i school that has been predominantly embraced.⁴

Between the 1950s and 1970s⁵ the NU faced fierce religious-ideological competitions with the reformist/modernist Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization. In the post-New Order era (1998–today), the organization⁶ strived against Islamist and other Middle Eastern-influenced Muslim associations, such as the political party Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the Indonesian chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HTI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the Indonesian Council of Jihad Warriors (MMI), and the Indonesian Council of Islamic Propagation (DDII) in terms of Islamic movement, ideologies, *da'wah* (the act of inviting or calling people to embrace Islam) activities, and other socio-political facets. While the NU is commonly known as representing the traditional and moderate version of Islam, the other groups are⁷ closely associated with puritan and conservative transnational networks of Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi movement. The latter has made significant manoeuvres to broaden their scope and spread their influence among the constituency of the NU and other organizations, such as the Muhammadiyah, and has challenged these larger organizations over their control of mosques, schools, and other institutions. While in post-authoritarian Indonesia the NU has openly expressed their support for the unity of the Indonesian state, the now dissolved HTI and other Salafism-influenced associations⁸ challenged the very idea of the nation as a legitimate entity and have endeavoured to transform Indonesia into an Islamic state.⁹

The NU is known to actively propagate the notion of Islam Nusantara, the NU's version of religiously¹⁰ tolerant and moderate Islam. Islam Nusantara is a relatively new distinctive notion of Islam based on the global viewpoint of Sunni Islam that has undergone interaction, contextualization, and indigenization of Indonesia's local belief system. While this term has been in circulation for decades, this NU version of Indonesian Islam, adopted at¹¹ a 2015 congress, has been tipped to promote moderation, inclusiveness, and tolerance not only among Muslims but also between Muslims and non-Muslims. From a broader perspective, the NU encourages its followers to practice a Sunni Islamic theological position of *Al-Wasatiyyah* (the middle¹² way) implemented in everyday balanced way of life (moderation). Indeed, the NU has adopted Islam Nusantara as a conceptual pillar, both domestically and internationally. It is in this sense that special branches of the NU worldwide campaign their version of Indonesian Islam: Islam Nusantara. So, how does the NU campaign Islam Nusantara in Germany, and position itself among other Indonesian Muslims as well as other Muslims? How do NU people as minority religious communities exercise their religious agency in non-Muslim societies?

In order to answer these questions, this article investigates how the special branch of the NU in Germany (PCI NU Germany) is extending its networks, seeking influence, competing and also compromising with other Indonesian Islamic organizations¹³ campaigning Indonesian Islam, and exercising its religious agency. This paper aims to provide an informed understanding of the socio-political-cultural dimensions of Indonesia's Islamic networks in Germany. By investigating the organizational projects and religious practices of PCI NU Germany through which cross-border networks are managed,

this essay is expected to show a display of various socio-religio expressions of Indonesian Islam and to highlight the transnational linkages of Indonesian religious communities overseas. While there are a few studies on Indonesian Muslims outside Indonesia, there is no single study on the NU in Germany, and so this study will be of great importance. This manuscript is written based on ethnographic fieldworks and multiple methods, including observations, in-depth interviews, casual chats, and hang-outs in the organization's religious meetings, social gatherings, and everyday life with the leaders and followers of PCI NU Germany in 2019 and 2020 in towns in Germany and Indonesia, as well as archiving of documents.

This paper argues that the NU in Germany is extending its transnational networks, claiming its religious agency, and strengthening its version of moderate Islam overseas in an effort to make its voices heard within the Islamic communities and broader public in the host country and maintain socio-religious connections with the home country. In addition, the NU in Germany's religious activities and the campaign of Indonesian Islam highly influence the reconstruction of the NU people's dual identities as Indonesian Muslims and German residents.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I explore the establishment and development of PCI NU Germany. I then sketch its religious activities. Third, I depict the rivalries among Indonesia's Muslim organizations in Germany and the promotion of Indonesian moderate Islam by the NU people. Fourth, I portray the orientation of PCI NU Germany's *da'wah* activities. Fifth, I investigate the ways the NU people assert their religious agency and preserve identity. Finally, the last section is the conclusion.

2. The Establishment and Development of PCI NU Germany

PCI NU Germany was founded in April 2011 in the Berlin residence of Syafiq Hasyim, the first chairperson of the *Syuriah* Council (supreme council) of PCI NU Germany (2011–2014), at that time a PhD student at The Free University of Berlin (Freie Universität Berlin). As the main architect of the organization, Hasyim had been already known in Indonesia as an NU and NGO activist as well as a public intellectual who wrote a number of academic and popular books and articles. Along with Hasyim, there were also other PhD students who contributed to the birth of the organization, such as Suratno, the first chairperson of the *Tanfidiyah* Council (executive council) (Goethe University Frankfurt—Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main), Asfa Widiyanto (University of Bonn—Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), Jaenal Effendi (University of Göttingen—Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), and Arli Parikesit (Leipzig University—Universität Leipzig). Some of these *nahdliyin* students previously assembled at KMNU (Keluarga Mahasiswa Nahdlatul Ulama—Family of Nahdlatul Ulama Students), an informal forum of the NU students to facilitate the student meetings, that was the embryo of PCI NU Germany.

One of the main purposes of the establishment of the organization was to respond to the growth and spread of Islamic transnational movements propagated by Indonesian migrant workers, professionals, students, and other diaspora who downgraded and opposed traditional-moderate religious expressions of fellow Indonesian Muslims in the country of residence, such as the Indonesian Tarbiyah movement (particularly the ideologies and religious practices of the PKS) and Salafism-Wahhabism. This purpose reminds us of the establishment of the NU in 1926. It was founded in response to the changing global developments in the Islamic world in the 1920s: the eradication of the caliphate, the invasion of Wahhabi into Mecca and the search for a new Islamic interna-

tionalism.⁵ Another principal aim was the students' longing to practice communal local-traditional religious rituals of the NU, such as *sūrah* Yā Sīn (the 36th *sūrah* of the Quran) Quranic recitations (*yasinan*) and religious meal feasts (*slametan*). In addition, another objective was to introduce the moderate version of Indonesian Islam to German citizens who were more familiar with Islam practiced by Turkish, Middle Eastern, and North African Muslims.⁶

Most NU students—the majority of which are BA and MA students and only a few are PhD students—study technological and health sciences, while only a few study social sciences and humanities. The main focal points of PCI NU Germany have been located in Berlin, Frankfurt, Gottingen, and Munich, while in the later developments, Hamburg, Bremen, Kassel, Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Bonn, Essen, Bielefeld, and Dresden have also become important hubs. Initially PCI NU Germany was dominated and organized by students. Today, however, migrant workers and professionals are at the helm of the organization. This significant shift marks the success of regeneration within the PCI NU Germany as expected at the beginning of the organization's foundation. It is believed that the management of PCI NU Germany in the hands of non-student diaspora will make the organization greater because they will stay longer in Germany—or may not even return to Indonesia—and thus will have more focus on it, compared to most students who will likely return to Indonesia when their studies come to an end.⁷

However, there is also a deep concern that all these processes of change in management are very sudden. Muhammad Rodlin Billah, the chairperson of the *Tanfidziyah* Council for the period of 2017–2019 and 2019–2021, laments this development. He reckons that the regeneration process is very minimal as the NU's regeneration scheme in Indonesia is not available in Germany. For example, he immediately became the chairperson of the *Tanfidziyah* Council when he joined the organization in 2017.⁸ I would maintain, however, that it is not surprising that Billah directly became a key board member of the organization considering the fact that he comes from a prominent NU family who owns *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Madura's towns of Bangkalan, Sampang, and Pamekasan from his paternal line and *pesantren* in Jombang from his maternal line. All these towns in Madura, East Java Province are well-known as traditional centres of a religious network on the island that consists of the NU, the *kiai*, and the *pesantren*,⁹ while Jombang, also located in East Java Province is a renowned *kota santri* (santri town), home to old, large, and reputable *pesantren* such as Tebuireng, Denanyar, and Tambakberas.¹⁰ Certainly, the high status of the *kiai* is also enjoyed by their families, such as in the case of Billah. People's regard for *kiai* families is central to the *kiai* and his family's success in winning sympathy. Although exceptions do occur, the position of *kiai* is an ascribed status, in which the children of *kiai* (especially, but not exclusively, the sons) also enjoy the high status bestowed upon their father—a position that they will assume, voluntarily or otherwise, later in life.¹¹

The organizational structure of PCI NU Germany is similar to that of the Central Board of the NU (PBNU) in which there are three core bodies, namely the *Syuriah* Council (supreme council), the *Mustasyar* Council (advisory council), and the *Tanfidziyah* Council (executive council), along with a number of autonomous bodies such as Lakpesdam (Institute for the Study and Development of Human Resources). PCI NU Germany consists of around 75–100 active members (those who are responsible for the management of the organization and/or routinely participate in the organization's activities). Including followers (those who are outside the administration and/or occasionally participate in the organization's activities), the number can reach to 200

individuals. However, the number can significantly increase if one count the number of NU sympathizers and/or other Indonesian Muslims who practice NU religious rituals but keep aloof from the organization's activities.

The first five-year period (2011–2016) of the organization can be considered as the period of formation, while the second five-year period (2016–2021) can be classified as the period of (internal) consolidation. The first period is mostly marked by the exercise of control by students, while the second period is highly indicated by the command of non-student diaspora: migrant workers and other professionals. It is quite surprising, at least compared to the neighbouring PCI NU the Netherlands, that many PCI NU Germany members and followers are those who were previously not linked to or at least do not follow the NU religious traditions in Indonesia since they primarily come from urban middle-class families, while most NU followers in Indonesia come from rural lower-class families. Nonetheless, several others, and certainly most of the board members, were raised and grew up in NU religious rituals and cultural traditions.

Prior to 2017, PCI NU Germany had no official legal standing. Since the beginning of 2017, the board of PCI NU Germany has attempted to transform the organization into an official organization that has legal standing from two parties: (1) The Central Board of NU as its overseas member, and (2) the German government, considering the country where PCI NU Germany is located. The first goal was achieved in August 2018 in which PCI NU Germany was officially recognized as one of the special branches of the NU through PBNU Decree number 259/A.II.04.d/08/2018. The second goal was finally achieved as of 4 February 2020 in which PCI NU Germany has been officially recognized by the German government through the Charlottenburg District Court, Berlin, as an *eingetragener Verein* or a registered association. The name of the association used on the official certificate is “Nahdlatul Ulama Jerman (NUJ) e.V.”, with the office address on Landsberger Allee 394, Büro 721–723, 12681 Berlin, Germany.

3. Religious Activities

In addition to practicing communal local-traditional religious rituals of the NU, such as *yasinan* and *slametan*, PCI NU Germany has also routinely, at least in Berlin, held Hadhrami-influenced Islamic rituals, such as the reading of religious text of *Rātib al-Haddād* which is quite popular in the circles of the Hadhrami families in Indonesia. This tradition came to the fore and was ignited by M. Husein Al-Kaff, the current vice chairperson of the *Tanfidiyah* Council, who has a Hadhrami genealogy. It is interesting to note that maintaining a *nahdliyin* identity is more essential for the non-student diaspora than the students because many of the former who stay longer in Germany do not wish to cut ties with their country of origin, while the latter are those who will likely return to Indonesia, and hence maintaining a *nahdliyin* identity is less important for them.

People like Al-Kaff who works as an engineer in a company in Berlin, as well as other professionals, including Billah who is also an engineer in Karlsruhe, are in a need of religious rituals that can arouse their spiritual passions. It seems that they are weary of the professional/intellectual atmosphere in their daily environment. This situation indicates that they are in constant search of the world, that is religiously defined and provides moral order and spiritual sanctuary to human beings, as Peter Berger called it “the sacred canopy”.¹² Therefore, compared to the highly academically engineered PCI NU the Netherlands that routinely holds academic discussions, including its flagship

agenda of a biennial international academic conference on Indonesian Islam¹³ due to the large number of PhD students in social sciences and humanities within the administration, so far PCI NU Germany has focused much on religious rituals as a way to preserve a *nahdliyin* identity. The organization has also formed a cooperation with other PCI NUs in Europe to exchange Indonesian preachers who come to Europe for religious purposes on the basis of invitation by PCI NUs in Europe. These preachers are usually invited for religious occasions, such as leading prayers in the holy month of Ramadan, *‘Īd al-Fitr* (a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of the fasting of Ramadan), or *‘Īd al-Adhā* (a religious holiday that honours the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismael as an act of obedience to God's command). In addition, coincidental religious musical performances, such as the event of “Ki Ageng Ganjur Goes to Europe” in March–April 2018, have been held across Europe. Such large cultural performances are usually organized together with other PCI NUs in Europe, Indonesian embassies, and other Indonesian organizations in Europe.

In terms of territorial extent and economic resources, PCI NU Germany is one of the largest among other PCI NUs in Europe. Nevertheless, the leaders of PCI NU Germany admit that other PCI NUs in Europe, such as PCI NU the Netherlands, have better human resources to develop the organization. Zacky Umam, the chairperson of the *Tanfidziyah* Council for the period of 2014–2018, claims that since most Indonesian students in Germany study natural sciences and come from urban middle-class families, the number of followers of Islam *garis lurus* (literally straight line Islam—a term to denote conservative and puritan forms of Islam in Indonesia) in Germany is large, including within the PCI NU Germany. He mentions that the followers of Islam *garis lurus* in NU are associated with *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence)-oriented *nahdliyin*; those who disagree with Said Aqil Siradj, the chairperson of the PBNU (2010–2021); or those who are against JIL (Jaringan Islam Liberal), a liberal Islamic organization whose some founders are NU activists.¹⁴ As I mentioned above, the socio-economic background of many young *nahdliyin* in Germany are urban middle-class groups, contrary to most *nahdliyin* in Indonesia who come from rural lower-class groups. In urban areas, these young *nahdliyin* are not accustomed to communal local-traditional religious rituals of the NU. Therefore, in the eyes of some board members, including Umam, these young men are seen too rigid, not flexible in the way of thinking and practicing religious rituals. However, the leaders of PCI NU Germany admit that these people are important for the development of the organization because their ways of thinking and working that have been influenced by German culture will lead to a change in working behaviour among the older generations of the NU people in Germany.¹⁵

This state of affairs shows us that in terms of religious activities, even though be in the same organization, the religious expressions of each member and follower of PCI NU Germany may be quite different. To a large extent, it shows us how each individual within the organization develops their own religious agency. Allen D. Hertzke argues that protections of religious agency, particularly the right to practice, interpret, criticize, or change one's faith, act as powerful engines of empowerment and integration of otherwise marginalized people. He suggests that agency facilitates the capacity to act on one's beliefs, commitments, relationships, and religious practices.¹⁶ It is in this sense that each individual under the umbrella of PCI NU Germany, no matter what their socio-religious background is, can empower themselves in terms of religious agency as we will see in the following sections.

4. Rivalries and the Promotion of Indonesian Moderate Islam

The leaders of PCI NU Germany assert that there has been a continuous rivalry with the Indonesian Tarbiyah movement represented by the aspirant PKS supporters. In Berlin, these supporters regularly congregate and hold religious activities at Al-Falah Mosque (registered in Germany as Indonesisches Weisheits- und Kulturzentrum (IWKZ) e.V.). In addition to PKS supporters, there are also Muhammadiyah people who assemble in the mosque. One of the most heated rivalries involves the plan to build mosques for Indonesian diaspora in Germany. In addition to Berlin, Indonesians in Hamburg and Frankfurt also have a plan to build their own mosques. The leaders of PCI NU Germany claim that the committee for the construction of the mosques is solely run by the supporters of the PKS and a small number of Muhammadiyah followers, a reason that the NU people stage protests at the Indonesian Embassy in Germany. Nevertheless, the Embassy does not give a privilege to any community, and in the eyes of the NU people, it neglects them. Consequently, PCI NU Germany has commenced a plan to build its own mosque in Berlin.

The board members also claim that people who hold religious activities at IWKZ always refer to themselves as “ordinary” Muslims and frequently emphasize “*ukhuwah islamiyah*” (brotherhood among Muslims), even though they actively propagate the PKS ideology. Meanwhile, the NU people always identify themselves as NU followers. Consequently, it is not uncommon that people will immediately accuse them of being sectarian. The board members of the PCI NU Germany are most concerned about the liberal accusation against them. As a result, they have never been invited to deliver sermons or lead prayers at IWKZ. One of the few NU boards who was able to give a sermon was Munirul Ikhwan, the chairperson of the *Syuriah* Council for a brief period of 2014–2015. However, individual relations between them remain good, especially among the non-student diaspora. Nevertheless, in terms of organizational contexts, the relations can become heated, including in the mosque construction plan.

There certainly is an extension of the contestation between the NU and the PKS in Indonesia¹⁷ which is brought to Germany. The supporters of the PKS pay much attention to the rapid shifts of political constellation and the development of Islam in Indonesia, including the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections that caused popular political polarization¹⁸ and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election that sparked a massive Islamist mobilization in late 2016 and early 2017 (*Aksi Bela Islam*²²—Action for Defending Islam) directed against the incumbent Chinese-Christian governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok).¹⁹ Meanwhile, President Joko Widodo (r. 2014–2019 and 2019–2024)⁵ has acknowledged the notion of Islam Nusantara by promoting it in global forums as a template for religious moderation. A number of state institutions, such as counter-terrorism agencies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have incorporated aspects of Islam Nusantara into their programmes which have stimulated NU leaders to claim that their understanding of Islam is now attached to official state doctrine.²⁰

These developments of Islam and politics in Indonesia that witnessed the open and closed supports of prominent NU leaders in Indonesia towards Joko Widodo and vice versa were not appreciated by the PKS supporters who saw it as a sign of victory for the *nahdliyin*. As a result, in the period of 2014–2019, there were a lot of frictions among Indonesians in Germany, particularly between the PKS supporters (and the supporters of the losing candidates in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections) and the NU people (and the supporters of the winning candidates in the 2014 and 2019 presidential

elections). Such political frictions eventually spread to religious strifes, including the debates on the concept of Islam Nusantara that was disputed by the opponents who believed that Islam in Indonesia should not be sectarian.

It is important to note that such a debate on the concept of Islam Nusantara also occurred within PCI NU Germany. Umam claims that many followers of PCI NU Germany did not understand the concept. Some of them took the view of conservative-puritan Islamic groups that disagree with the notion of Islam Nusantara which is seen as a liberal-secular as well as syncretic thought and practices of Islam. Umam believes that one crucial strategy to approach them is to remind them of the NU traditions. One example is that the board members of PCI NU Germany should not talk about “multicultural Islam” or “plural Islam”, because that will be immediately rejected by those who view the notion of multiculturalism and pluralism incompatible with Islam, and instead the boards should focus much more on religious rituals.²¹ This situation indicates that campaigning Islam Nusantara as a moderate form of Indonesian Islam is very important for the NU overseas, and that it faces many challenges from various opposing parties.

In general, the campaign can be seen as a way that individuals claim and demonstrate a meaningful religious identity, rightly conforming to Laura M. Leming's suggestion on agency, which states that agency is not practiced in a vacuum but is enacted within specific social contexts. Therefore, religious agency can be understood as a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity, as can also see in the rivalries between the two parties above. Leming proposes that when religious agency is operative, religion is performed as well as practiced; it is consciously, rather than repetitively, enacted.²²

5. The Orientation of *Da'wah* Activities

The main orientation of PCI NU Germany's *da'wah* activities is directed to the Indonesian diaspora in Germany. The leaders of PCI NU Germany admit that conducting *da'wah* to German people is a very arduous task because it requires hard efforts such as understanding the language and more importantly, the culture. As a matter of fact, the organization does not have the people with that capacity. In addition to students and professionals, the Indonesian diaspora in Germany consists mostly of low-paying wage workers who do not have much time to self-learn about Islam. Through *pengajian* (Islamic religious congregations) and other *da'wah* activities, PCI NU Germany introduces Islam to these people and conveys the appropriate impression that the NU people are not what they used to imagine (for instance being liberal Muslims). One such a pivotal event to do so, for instance, was made through a public seminar discussing an Islamic-themed book entitled *Atlas Wali Songo*²³ written by Agus Sunyoto. The seminar was held in 2013 with the speakers coming from both IWKZ and PCI NU Germany. Makky Sandra Jaya, an engineer who long resided in Germany, represented IWKZ, while Syafiq Hasyim and Munirul Ikhwan spoke on behalf of PCI NU Germany. One of the purposes of the seminar was to show that mastery of Arabic Islamic materials is important in Islam, not only depending on common sense. In the seminar, Hasyim made a presentation about the history of the NU and Wali Songo in which he used Arabic sources with bare Arabic script. After IWKZ's turn, it turned out that its speaker could not read Arabic script. The audience then gave a praising response to PCI NU Germany for demonstrating the proficiency in reading and under-

standing original and authoritative Islamic sources in Arabic which is a rare expertise among most Indonesian Muslims.²⁴

In recent years, particularly since Billah took the position of the chairperson of the *Tanfidziyah* Council in 2017, the orientation of PCI NU Germany's *da'wah* activities has also been directed to the home country. The organization has cooperations with several parties. One of them is with Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya (UNUSA), a private university under the auspices of the NU. The cooperation with UNUSA is manifested in the NU Global Connection programme, which is a programme of exchange of ideas in public discussions and seminars on various topics, ranging from religious topics to academic topics. In addition, there is also a joint programme with NU's academic institutions in Indonesia that focuses on the exchange of information from Germany to Indonesia and vice versa in terms of scholarship opportunities in Germany with an expectation that there will be more NU people who study in Germany. Furthermore, every year, and particularly every Ramadan, the organization distributes *Zakāh al-Fitr* (a charity taken for the poor a few days before the end of fasting in Ramadan) and *Zakāh al-Māl* (*zakāh* on wealth) to Indonesia. In doing so, PCI NU Germany collaborates with Lazisnu East Java Chapter, an autonomous body within the NU that focuses on the distribution of charities.

In addition to directing *da'wah* activities to the home country, PCI NU Germany has also attempted to expand its activities and influence overseas and in the country of residence. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, PCI NU Germany frequently holds joint webinar with other PCI NUs worldwide. One of the most ardent partners is PCI NU People's Republic of China. For cooperations with fellow Indonesian non-Muslims, PCI NU Germany exchanges ideas in religious issues with KMKI (Indonesian Catholic Student Family) Germany by occasionally inviting each other in both religions' holidays. For the German Muslim communities, PCI NU Germany has collaborated with various organizations, for example being an irregular guest speaker at the Deutsche Islam Akademie Berlin whose congregations are mostly foreign-born Muslims, to disseminate NU's version of moderate Islamic teachings, such as the teachings of the founder of the NU, Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari, in the book entitled *Adab al-'Ālim wa al-Muta'allim* (ethics of seeking knowledge). Apart from that, the organization has been working on collaborations with German organizations that have an interest in the notion of Indonesian moderate Islam. One of the organizations that has a working collaboration is Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) which in 2017 collaborated with PCI NU Germany in a number of public seminars to project Islam Nusantara as a model of "friendly" Islam to be implemented in Germany. For the wider public in Indonesia, PCI NU Germany has vigorously conveyed its messages through social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube.

6. Asserting Religious Agency and Preserving Identity

Agency is mostly known as the capacity of individuals to do something independently, including making their own choices. Richard Beck and C. Dewayne Miller define agency as motivation concerned with dominance, achievement, and instrumentality.²⁵ In addition, agency is also defined as a visible individual effort. John O'Brien reveals an interactional means by which people express religious agency through emphasizing their own control over their specific level of participation in religious rituals and practices. In emphasizing effort through language and labelling oneself as a participating agent in rituals, people draw attention to agentive selves in the course of exercising reli-

religious obligations. In emphasizing control, people enact religious agency in relation to religion by exhibiting their ability to pull away from religious obligations.²⁶

If we look at Billah's processes in joining PCI NU Germany, we can see that he has continuously exercised his religious agency. Billah claims that the motivation to join the organization is because he wants to improve the quality of his life. Although he comes from an NU family, he had never enrolled in a formal Islamic educational institution in Indonesia. He has lived in Germany since 2010 and has found continuous challenges as a Muslim in everyday life in a non-Muslim country. Unexpectedly, in between 2010 and 2017, he attempted to seek answers to all spiritual and religious matters from other Islamic circles in Germany. Apparently, the answers did not satisfy him. He also gradually learned that in Karlsruhe, his residence in Germany, the NU was not popular and was in fact a minority. He compared it to the contrary condition in Indonesia in which the NU is the largest Muslim organization. He thus began searching an Islamic organization that would suit his thought and practices, an organization that would enable him to learn Islam by, for instance, reciting the Quran and conducting prayers in a way that he did during his time in Indonesia. He finally found PCI NU Germany in 2017 and was immediately asked to lead the organization as the chairperson of the *Tanfidziyah* Council.

In relation to Billah's case, Billah and also other NU followers in Germany emphasize their own control over participation in Islamic rituals and practices through PCI NU Germany that acts as a melting pot for Muslims with varied religious backgrounds. These people act as participating agents who, according to Leming, show a consideration of religious agency, that is how individuals and groups assert ownership of a religious tradition and exert pressure to transform it even as they transmit it through their active participation. When religious identity is salient, that is, claimed or owned in a way that runs deeper than ascribed identity, and when it propels an individual to act for the simultaneous transformation and transmission of their tradition in ways that engage them at emotional, intellectual, and physical levels, this should be understood as exercising religious agency.²⁷

In order to facilitate members and followers of PCI NU Germany who are not accustomed to practice communal local-traditional religious rituals and also to introduce the organization to the Indonesian diaspora extensively, the board members of the organization irregularly organize public discussions with guest speakers of various background, such as academics, politicians, state officials, activists, artists, or other public figures, from Indonesia who come to Germany in an irregular basis. In doing so, the organization usually cooperates with the PPI (the umbrella organization of Indonesian students association abroad) and the Indonesian Embassy.

In the context of religious agency, religious groups may become "community groups", "grassroots organizations", or part of "social movements" when they challenge the hegemony of the state whereas they remain "religious" when they are associated with dominant ideas and practices. Consequently, agency cannot clearly be attributed to either sacral or secular structures, ideas or worldviews. At the local level the secular and sacral are mutually constitutive.²⁸ It is in this sense that the PCI NU Germany has complex experiences. In Germany, PCI NU plays both roles as a "community group" and a "religious group". As a community group, PCI NU Germany challenges policies implemented by the state as the German government rarely has the power to push for nation-wide changes, such as the introduction of Islamic religious lessons in school. In addition, it is Germany's various states which are the ones with legal means to make society more accommodating towards Muslims. This relates to things like Islamic

burials, giving time off on Islamic holidays, and offering spiritual care in hospitals and jails. As a religious group, PCI NU Germany becomes a shelter that provides its followers to practice communal religious activities. Therefore, in addition to promoting sacral ideas, PCI NU Germany has also extended its secular activities in the social and political worlds, and thus asserting its agency through its worldviews that are mutually constitutive of the secular and the sacral.

In terms of maintaining identity, the issue of NU's followers' identity in Germany is different for each person. For most students who will likely return to Indonesia, it does not really matter. The identity issue is more of a call to the NU traditions as well as a counterweight to conservative-puritan traditions of Indonesian Muslims in Germany and right-wing Islamophobic Germans. For the non-student diaspora, meanwhile, they are actually expected to actively contribute in promoting moderate versions of Islam in Germany so that the face of Islam²⁸ Germany is not only dominated by Turkish, Middle Eastern, or North African faces. It is important to note that Islam in Europe has been seen as a spectre haunting the continent. With rapid widespread and invigorating fear, suspicion, and hostility toward Islam, it is not surprising that these feelings have been turned upon Muslim populations across Europe.²⁹ Therefore, the pressures of being Muslims are felt stronger by the non-student diaspora.

The board members of PCI NU Germany actually expect equal relations with other Muslims in Germany from various national backgrounds. Nevertheless, the reality is many times very different with the expectation. These Muslims for the most part feel much superior and when the NU people face them, many times these Indonesian Muslims feel inferior against them. However, despite showing a large degree of inferiority to other Muslims and also German people, the NU followers do not avoid encountering new cultures and traditions. Instead, they demonstrate their own ones and remain open to other cultures and traditions. In sum, the NU's identity is very important for NU followers because it brings them to a new place to live and develop ideas and practices. Despite this rather imbalance relation, in this context of identity, we can see that the NU people are shaping religious revival.

Today, one of the most widespread issues that has given rise to a heated debate in Europe relates to the continent's²⁵ complex relationship with its large Muslim minorities largely comprising migrants from North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Turkey and beyond.³⁰ Now Islam poses the challenge of how to manage the European public sphere and life at the local, national, and regional levels while³ accommodating the political, social, cultural, and economic needs of all Europeans.³¹ Islam in Europe is in a state of flux, but so is religion in general in Europe, and it is useful to recognize how these two dimensions affect one another: understanding, in other words, how European policies impact upon Muslim communities, but also how activities and thoughts of Muslim individuals and groups influence changing conceptions and policy considerations on the place of religion in the European public sphere.³²

Germany is among the countries in Europe which have been facing complex encounters with Islam. In Germany, it was mainly Muslim immigrants who arrived during the 1960s under the so-called "guest worker" agreements who founded Islamic associations and practiced their religion in public.³³ Despite their negative labelling, these substantial minorities have important social and political implications for the respective societies, particularly as the communities are made up of recent immigrants who differ not only³³ their religion but in other cultural aspects.³⁴ As many Muslim groups have increasingly organized themselves effectively to engage with local administrations, local populations, and other areas of the public domain, they have voiced their concerns by broadening their

agendas to address an ever wider set of socio-political spheres. These include the freedom to exercise religious observances, the establishment of various Islamic organizations, and the gaining of political representation. These spheres are themselves conditioned by evolving contextual considerations including national political discourses (for instance federalism in Germany).³⁵ Indonesian Muslims in Germany that belong to PCI NU Germany have also experienced such circumstances. In the final note, we should not downplay their resilience and agency as they are also members of a community and agents of their own lives.

7. Conclusion

As an organization founded in 2011, PCI NU Germany is relatively new, at least compared to other Indonesian organizations in Europe, such as *Persatuan Pemuda Muslim se-Eropa (Young Muslim Association in Europe)*, founded in 1971 in the Netherlands. As a new Islamic organization, PCI NU Germany does not yet to play significant roles in shaping and characterizing Islam in the country of residence, and in point of fact, it is hardly known by German communities who are more aware of the presence of Turkish, Middle Eastern, and North African forms of Islam. For some locals who may be aware of the organization, PCI NU Germany is seen as more representing Indonesia rather than Islam. Therefore, its position is actually more isolated in the Muslim world in Germany because it functions more within the Indonesian diaspora.

Be that as it may, PCI NU Germany has some potentials of inclusive approaches and also in adapting to a liberal society. As religious organizations are important sites for religious experiences and for the constructing of religious identities, they are suppliers of “public narratives”, accounts that express the history and purposes of a cultural or institutional entity.³⁶ Since its inception, PCI NU Germany has extended the NU's transnational networks; strengthened its version of moderate Islam; and for its members and followers, enacted their religious agency. These endeavours can be seen as an attempt to make its voices heard within the Islamic communities and broader public in the host country and the home country. The NU in Germany's religious activities and the campaign of Indonesian Islam also highly influence the reconstruction of the NU people's dual identities as Indonesian Muslims and European residents. Through PCI NUs, including PCI NU Germany, in the coming years, these ventures will prove or will not prove whether Indonesian Islam is successful in playing a much bigger and more global role for exporting moderate Islam worldwide.

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NOTES

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Indonesia's Islamic Networks in Germany: The Nahdlatul Ulama in Campaigning Islam Nusantara and Enacting Religious Agency

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