

FROM LOCAL TRADITION TO GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: PESANTREN NETWORKS AND COSMOPOLITAN ISLAM IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of pesantren in Indonesia from locally rooted Islamic educational institutions into centers of cosmopolitan Islam connected to global engagement. The research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytic approach focusing on three prominent pesantren: Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Pesantren Tebuireng Jombang, and Sumatera Thawalib Padang Panjang. Data were collected through literature reviews, institutional documents, and relevant scholarly studies on pesantren networks and Islamic education in Indonesia. The findings show that pesantren play an important role in linking local Islamic traditions with broader global Islamic discourses. Gontor stands out through its modern education system and international orientation, Tebuireng demonstrates Islamic moderation rooted in the traditions of Nahdlatul Ulama and Indonesian nationalism, while Sumatera Thawalib represents an Islamic reform movement that promotes intellectual openness and transnational thought. This study argues that pesantren are not isolated traditional institutions, but dynamic actors capable of integrating local identity with global engagement. Through educational reform and intellectual networking, pesantren contribute significantly to strengthening moderate and inclusive Islam amid global challenges and religious pluralism.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi pesantren di Indonesia dari lembaga pendidikan Islam berbasis tradisi lokal menjadi pusat Islam kosmopolitan yang terhubung dengan dunia global. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-analitik terhadap tiga pesantren terkemuka, yaitu Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Pesantren Tebuireng Jombang, dan Sumatera Thawalib Padang Panjang. Data diperoleh melalui studi pustaka, dokumen kelembagaan, dan berbagai kajian ilmiah terkait jaringan pesantren serta pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pesantren memiliki peran penting dalam menghubungkan tradisi Islam lokal dengan wacana Islam global. Gontor menonjol melalui pendidikan modern dan orientasi internasional, Tebuireng menampilkan moderasi Islam yang berpijak pada tradisi Nahdlatul Ulama dan nasionalisme Indonesia, sedangkan Sumatera Thawalib merepresentasikan gerakan reformisme Islam yang mendorong keterbukaan intelektual dan pemikiran transnasional. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pesantren bukan institusi tradisional yang terisolasi, melainkan aktor dinamis yang mampu memadukan identitas lokal dan keterlibatan global. Melalui reformasi pendidikan dan jejaring intelektual, pesantren berkontribusi dalam penguatan Islam moderat dan inklusif di tengah tantangan global dan pluralisme keagamaan.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren have historically played a central role in shaping Islamic education and Muslim social life in Indonesia through the transmission of religious knowledge and cultural values (Dhofier, 2011). Scholars argue that pesantren are not only traditional Islamic boarding schools but also dynamic institutions that continuously adapt to social and political transformations in Indonesian society (Hefner, 2009). The development of pesantren networks across the archipelago enabled the circulation of Islamic scholarship, religious authority, and social influence among Muslim communities (Azra, 2004). These networks were formed through the mobility of ulama, student exchanges, and intellectual connections between pesantren in different regions (Laffan, 2003). Consequently, pesantren networks became important foundations for the emergence of Islamic intellectual traditions that combine local identity with broader global engagement (Kersten, 2015).

The concept of cosmopolitan Islam refers to Islamic perspectives that promote openness, intercultural dialogue, and constructive engagement with global modernity while maintaining Islamic principles (Appiah, 2006). In Indonesia, cosmopolitan Islam is closely associated with moderate Islamic traditions that emphasize tolerance, pluralism, and social harmony (Hefner, 2000). Scholars note that pesantren contribute significantly to the development of cosmopolitan Islam through educational practices that integrate classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary knowledge (Bruinessen, 2013). The interaction between pesantren and transnational Islamic discourses has also encouraged Indonesian Muslim scholars to engage with issues such as democracy, human rights, and multiculturalism (Burhani, 2018). Therefore, pesantren are increasingly viewed as important institutions that mediate the relationship between local Islamic traditions and global Islamic thought (Tan, 2014).

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor represents one of the most influential examples of pesantren modernization in Indonesia (Lukens-Bull, 2005). Gontor combines traditional Islamic values with modern educational systems that emphasize discipline, foreign language mastery, and international orientation (Zarkasyi, 2005). Scholars argue that Gontor has successfully established broad alumni networks that connect Indonesian Muslims with global Islamic educational institutions (Tan, 2014). The pesantren also promotes a cosmopolitan outlook by encouraging students to engage with diverse intellectual traditions and international perspectives (Hefner, 2009). Through these approaches, Gontor demonstrates how pesantren can preserve Islamic traditions while participating actively in global educational and religious networks (Kersten, 2015).

Pesantren Tebuireng also plays an important role in promoting moderate and cosmopolitan Islam in Indonesia through its strong connection with Nahdlatul Ulama traditions (Bush, 2009). Founded by KH Hasyim Asy'ari, Tebuireng became a center for Islamic scholarship that emphasizes tolerance, morality, and social harmony (Fealy, 1998). Scholars observe that Tebuireng encourages inclusive Islamic practices that accommodate local culture and support peaceful coexistence within Indonesia's plural society (Wahid, 2007). In recent decades, Tebuireng has expanded its engagement through interfaith dialogue and cooperation with international educational institutions (Burhani, 2018). These developments illustrate how traditional pesantren can actively participate in global discussions while maintaining their local religious identity (Hefner, 2000).

Sumatera Thawalib Padang Panjang represents an important reformist movement in Indonesian Islamic education during the early twentieth century (Abdullah, 1971). The institution introduced modern classroom systems and rational approaches to Islamic learning as responses to colonial modernity and educational reform (Noer, 1973). Scholars argue that Sumatera Thawalib maintained strong intellectual connections with reformist Islamic movements in the Middle East (Azra, 2004). These transnational interactions contributed to the emergence of progressive Muslim intellectuals and nationalist leaders in Indonesia (Laffan, 2003). Consequently, Sumatera Thawalib became an important component of pesantren networks that shaped cosmopolitan Islamic thought in Indonesian society (Kersten, 2015).

Globalization has significantly transformed pesantren networks by expanding their engagement with international educational institutions and transnational Islamic organizations (Tan, 2014). The development of digital communication technologies has enabled pesantren to participate more actively in global discussions concerning Islamic education and religious moderation (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Scholars note that pesantren increasingly function as mediators between local Islamic traditions and global Islamic discourses (Hefner, 2009). Despite these global interactions, pesantren continue to preserve local cultural identities and community-based religious practices within their educational systems (Bruinessen, 2013). This balance between local tradition and global engagement reflects the cosmopolitan character of contemporary Indonesian Islam (Burhani, 2018).

Although many studies have discussed pesantren and Islamic education, research focusing specifically on pesantren networks and cosmopolitan Islam remains relatively limited (Dhofier, 2011). Existing scholarship often examines pesantren from perspectives of traditionalism, political Islam, or educational reform separately (Hefner, 2009). Comparative studies involving Gontor, Tebuireng, and Sumatera Thawalib within the framework of cosmopolitan Islam are still uncommon in Indonesian Islamic studies (Tan, 2014). This study therefore aims to analyze how pesantren networks contribute to the formation of cosmopolitan Islam through educational reform, intellectual exchange, and global engagement in Indonesia (Azra, 2004). Ultimately, this research argues that pesantren are not isolated traditional institutions, but dynamic actors that connect local Islamic traditions with global Islamic civilization (Kersten, 2015).

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive-analytic approach to examine the transformation of pesantren from locally rooted Islamic educational institutions into globally engaged actors of cosmopolitan Islam in Indonesia (Snyder, 2019). A qualitative method was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of social, cultural, and educational dynamics within pesantren networks. The research focused on three prominent pesantren representing different orientations of Islamic education in Indonesia, namely Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, Pesantren Tebuireng Jombang, and Sumatera Thawalib Padang Panjang. These institutions were chosen due to their historical significance, educational influence, and active engagement with both national and international Islamic discourses. The study aimed to explore how these pesantren negotiate local traditions and global engagement through their educational systems, intellectual networks, and social activities.

The data for this research were collected primarily through library research and document analysis. Sources included academic books, journal articles, institutional reports, historical documents, and previous studies related to pesantren networks, Islamic education, and cosmopolitan Islam in Indonesia. Scholarly publications indexed in Scopus and other reputable academic databases were used to ensure the credibility and reliability of the references. In addition, institutional publications and archival materials from the selected pesantren were analyzed to identify their educational orientation, intellectual traditions, and transnational connections. The collected data were then categorized according to themes such as modernization, religious moderation, educational reform, and global networking within pesantren communities.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and interpretative techniques to identify patterns, similarities, and differences among the three pesantren (Paul & Criado, 2020). The analysis focused on understanding how pesantren networks contribute to the formation of cosmopolitan Islamic values, including tolerance, inclusiveness, intercultural dialogue, and global awareness. This study also examined the relationship between local Islamic traditions and global Islamic discourses within the educational and social practices of the selected institutions. To strengthen the validity of the findings, the research compared information from various academic and institutional sources through a process of data triangulation. Through this approach, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of pesantren networks in shaping cosmopolitan Islam in contemporary Indonesia.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pesantren Networks: Connection of Figures and Intellectual Traditions

The historical development of pesantren networks in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of charismatic religious figures who transmitted Islamic knowledge through educational and intellectual connections across generations (Azra, 2004). Academic studies demonstrate that pesantren networks were formed through teacher-student relationships, pilgrimage routes, and scholarly exchanges linking local ulama with international centers of Islamic learning in the Middle East (Dhofier, 2011). Historical documents reveal that Indonesian ulama who studied in Mecca and Cairo later returned to establish pesantren while preserving intellectual ties with their teachers abroad (Laffan, 2003). These connections created a transnational circulation of Islamic ideas that shaped the character of Indonesian Islam as adaptive and cosmopolitan in orientation (Hefner, 2009). Consequently, pesantren became not only local educational institutions but also important nodes within broader global Islamic intellectual networks (Kersten, 2015).

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor developed its intellectual network primarily through the leadership of its founding figures, namely KH Ahmad Sahal, KH Zainuddin Fananie, and KH Imam Zarkasyi, who are collectively known as the Trimurti of Gontor (Lukens-Bull, 2005). Institutional reports and historical studies indicate that KH Imam Zarkasyi played a major role in reforming pesantren education by integrating modern organizational systems, language education, and international perspectives into the curriculum (Zarkasyi, 2005). The intellectual orientation of Gontor was influenced by reformist ideas from Al-Azhar University in Egypt and educational models from modern Islamic institutions in South Asia and the Middle East (Tan, 2014). Through alumni networks and institutional collaborations, Gontor established intellectual connections with

Muslim scholars and universities in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia (Hefner, 2009). These transnational interactions contributed to the emergence of globally oriented Muslim intellectuals while maintaining strong pesantren traditions rooted in Indonesian Islamic culture (Burhani, 2018).

Pesantren Tebuireng developed its intellectual tradition through the influential role of KH Hasyim Asy'ari, who is recognized as one of the most important ulama in Indonesian Islamic history (Fealy, 1998). Historical records show that KH Hasyim Asy'ari studied under prominent scholars in Mecca, including Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, before returning to Java to establish Tebuireng in 1899 (Bruinessen, 2013). Academic literature explains that Tebuireng became a major center for the transmission of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah traditions and the intellectual foundation of Nahdlatul Ulama (Bush, 2009). The pesantren also produced influential figures such as KH Wahid Hasyim and Abdurrahman Wahid, who connected pesantren traditions with democratic values, pluralism, and global Islamic discourse (Barton, 2002). Through these figures, Tebuireng established intellectual relationships with scholars, interfaith institutions, and educational organizations both within Indonesia and internationally (Hefner, 2000).

Sumatera Thawalib Padang Panjang emerged as an important center of Islamic reformism through the contributions of key figures such as Haji Rasul (Abdul Karim Amrullah), Zainuddin Labay El-Yunusi, and Mahmud Yunus (Abdullah, 1971). Historical studies indicate that these scholars were strongly influenced by reformist movements associated with Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida in Egypt (Noer, 1973). Academic books on Indonesian Islamic reform explain that Sumatera Thawalib introduced modern classroom systems, rational teaching methods, and critical approaches to Islamic scholarship (Azra, 2004). Its intellectual tradition encouraged students to engage with global Islamic debates concerning reform, modernity, and nationalism during the colonial period (Laffan, 2003). As a result, Sumatera Thawalib established strong intellectual links between Indonesian Muslim reformists and broader Islamic renewal movements in the Middle East (Kersten, 2015).

The intellectual traditions of these pesantren were strengthened through the circulation of books, religious manuscripts, and scholarly publications that connected Indonesian ulama with global Islamic scholarship (Dhofier, 2011). Journal articles on pesantren networks demonstrate that kitab kuning traditions remained central within pesantren education while simultaneously accommodating modern scientific and social knowledge (Hefner, 2009). Institutional reports from Gontor, Tebuireng, and Sumatera Thawalib reveal the importance of multilingual education, especially Arabic and English, in facilitating intellectual interaction with international Muslim communities (Tan, 2014). These educational strategies enabled pesantren scholars to participate in conferences, academic exchanges, and transnational Islamic organizations across Southeast Asia and the Middle East (Burhani, 2018). Consequently, pesantren intellectual traditions evolved into dynamic systems that connected local Islamic learning with global intellectual engagement (Kersten, 2015).

Academic analyses also highlight the importance of alumni networks in expanding pesantren influence beyond Indonesia (Lukens-Bull, 2005). Graduates from Gontor became educators, diplomats, and Islamic scholars who established connections with universities and Islamic institutions in the Middle East, Europe, and North America (Hefner, 2009).

Tebuireng alumni contributed to national and international discussions on democracy, interfaith dialogue, and Islamic moderation through organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (Bush, 2009). Meanwhile, Sumatera Thawalib graduates played important roles in reformist Islamic organizations, nationalist movements, and educational modernization during the twentieth century (Noer, 1973). These alumni networks demonstrate that pesantren function not only as local educational institutions but also as producers of transnational Muslim intellectuals with cosmopolitan perspectives (Burhani, 2018).

The continuing evolution of pesantren networks reflects the ability of Indonesian Islamic institutions to adapt to globalization while preserving their intellectual traditions and cultural identity (Tan, 2014). Contemporary pesantren increasingly engage with digital platforms, international academic collaborations, and global Islamic forums that expand their transnational influence (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Scholars argue that these developments strengthen the cosmopolitan character of Indonesian Islam because pesantren encourage intercultural dialogue, moderation, and openness toward global knowledge (Bruinessen, 2013). At the same time, pesantren continue to preserve traditional teacher-student relationships and classical Islamic scholarship as the foundation of their educational identity (Hefner, 2009). Therefore, the historical and intellectual connections established by figures from Gontor, Tebuireng, and Sumatera Thawalib demonstrate how pesantren networks have transformed from local traditions into globally connected centers of cosmopolitan Islam in Indonesia (Kersten, 2015).

The intellectual connections among Indonesian pesantren were also strengthened through organizational affiliations and Islamic movements that facilitated cooperation between scholars and educational institutions (Azra, 2004). Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and various reformist organizations became important platforms for pesantren figures to exchange ideas concerning Islamic education, social reform, and national identity (Bush, 2009). Scholars note that Tebuireng maintained strong relations with Nahdlatul Ulama networks, while Sumatera Thawalib was closely associated with reformist Islamic circles influenced by Middle Eastern modernism (Noer, 1973). Gontor, meanwhile, positioned itself as an independent educational institution that emphasized global Islamic brotherhood beyond organizational affiliations while still maintaining connections with national Islamic movements (Lukens-Bull, 2005). These organizational and ideological interactions contributed to the formation of diverse but interconnected intellectual traditions within Indonesian pesantren networks (Kersten, 2015).

Historical documents and institutional reports further indicate that pesantren networks expanded significantly through international scholarship programs and academic exchanges during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Tan, 2014). Many graduates from Gontor, Tebuireng, and Sumatera Thawalib pursued higher education at institutions such as Al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Medina, McGill University, and Leiden University before returning to Indonesia as scholars and educators (Hefner, 2009). These experiences enabled pesantren intellectuals to engage with contemporary global issues including democracy, Islamic reform, gender discourse, and interreligious dialogue (Burhani, 2018). Scholars argue that exposure to international academic environments encouraged pesantren communities to reinterpret Islamic teachings within pluralistic and multicultural contexts (Bruinessen, 2013). As a result, pesantren networks increasingly

functioned as bridges connecting Indonesian Islamic traditions with broader global intellectual currents and academic communities (Azra, 2004).

The continuity of pesantren intellectual traditions in the contemporary era demonstrates their resilience amid rapid social and technological transformation (Dhofier, 2011). Digital media platforms, online learning systems, and international Islamic forums have allowed pesantren scholars to expand their influence beyond conventional educational spaces (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Contemporary pesantren figures from Gontor, Tebuireng, and reformist institutions continue to promote moderate Islam by participating in global discussions on peacebuilding, religious tolerance, and humanitarian issues (Hefner, 2011). At the same time, these institutions preserve the ethical values of pesantren culture, including respect for teachers, communal solidarity, and spiritual discipline, as the foundation of their intellectual identity (Wahid, 2007). Therefore, the enduring connections between pesantren figures, intellectual traditions, and transnational networks confirm the important role of pesantren in shaping cosmopolitan Islam in Indonesia and the wider Muslim world (Kersten, 2015).

Shaping Cosmopolitan Islam Through Pesantren

Pesantren in Indonesia have played a significant role in shaping cosmopolitan Islam through their long-standing intellectual traditions, educational reforms, and transnational scholarly networks (Azra, 2004). Academic studies explain that pesantren historically connected local Muslim communities with broader Islamic intellectual centers in the Middle East through pilgrimage, study circles, and scholarly mobility (Dhofier, 2011). These interactions enabled pesantren to absorb global Islamic ideas while preserving local cultural traditions and social harmony within Indonesian society (Hefner, 2009). Scholars argue that the combination of local wisdom and global engagement became the foundation of cosmopolitan Islam in the Indonesian context (Kersten, 2015). Consequently, pesantren emerged as dynamic institutions capable of mediating between religious orthodoxy, modernity, and plural social realities (Burhani, 2018).

The cosmopolitan character of pesantren was strongly influenced by key Islamic figures who promoted intellectual openness and educational transformation within Indonesian Islam (Lukens-Bull, 2005). KH Imam Zarkasyi of Gontor introduced a modern pesantren system that emphasized discipline, multilingual education, and international engagement as part of Islamic learning (Zarkasyi, 2005). KH Hasyim Asy'ari of Tebuireng promoted Sunni traditionalism while encouraging tolerance, nationalism, and social harmony within Muslim society (Fealy, 1998). Reformist scholars from Sumatera Thawalib such as Haji Rasul and Mahmud Yunus encouraged rational approaches to Islamic scholarship and engagement with global reformist movements (Noer, 1973). Through these influential figures, pesantren developed educational traditions that supported moderate, inclusive, and globally connected Islamic perspectives in Indonesia (Bruinessen, 2013).

Gontor became one of the clearest examples of how pesantren networks shaped cosmopolitan Islam through educational modernization and global intellectual engagement (Tan, 2014). Institutional reports and academic analyses show that Gontor integrated Arabic and English language mastery into its curriculum to prepare students for interaction with international Muslim communities (Lukens-Bull, 2005). The pesantren also established extensive alumni networks that connected graduates with universities and Islamic

institutions in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia (Hefner, 2009). Scholars argue that these transnational networks enabled Gontor graduates to participate actively in global Islamic discourse while maintaining Indonesian cultural and religious identities (Kersten, 2015). As a result, Gontor contributed significantly to the formation of Muslim intellectuals who combined Islamic ethics, nationalism, and cosmopolitan engagement (Burhani, 2018).

Pesantren Tebuireng shaped cosmopolitan Islam through its commitment to moderation, interreligious dialogue, and democratic values within Indonesian society (Bush, 2009). Historical studies indicate that KH Hasyim Asy'ari and later Abdurrahman Wahid connected pesantren traditions with broader global discussions concerning pluralism, peacebuilding, and human rights (Barton, 2002). Tebuireng maintained intellectual ties with Middle Eastern scholars while also engaging with Western academic institutions and civil society organizations (Hefner, 2000). Scholars observe that the pesantren promoted inclusive Islamic teachings that respected local traditions and supported peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities (Wahid, 2007). Through these intellectual and institutional networks, Tebuireng strengthened the image of Indonesian Islam as tolerant, democratic, and cosmopolitan in orientation (Bruinessen, 2013).

Sumatera Thawalib contributed to cosmopolitan Islam through its reformist educational traditions and strong intellectual connections with global Islamic modernism (Abdullah, 1971). Historical documents show that its leading scholars were influenced by reformist thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, whose ideas circulated widely through journals and educational networks (Azra, 2004). The institution introduced rational teaching methods, modern classroom systems, and critical discussions concerning Islamic reform and social progress (Noer, 1973). Scholars argue that these reforms encouraged Indonesian Muslims to engage with issues of nationalism, anti-colonialism, and modernity from an Islamic perspective (Laffan, 2003). Consequently, Sumatera Thawalib became an important intellectual center that connected Indonesian Muslim reformism with broader global Islamic movements (Kersten, 2015).

The strength of cosmopolitan Islam within pesantren was also reinforced through the circulation of intellectual traditions, religious texts, and alumni networks across generations (Dhofier, 2011). Academic books and journal articles demonstrate that pesantren graduates established new educational institutions while preserving intellectual ties with their teachers and alma mater pesantren (Azra, 2004). These alumni networks expanded pesantren influence nationally and internationally through Islamic organizations, universities, diplomatic institutions, and civil society movements (Hefner, 2009). Scholars note that pesantren traditions emphasized ethical values such as tolerance, humility, and communal solidarity, which became essential components of cosmopolitan Islamic practice in Indonesia (Bruinessen, 2013). Therefore, pesantren networks created sustainable mechanisms for transmitting moderate Islamic values across local and global Muslim communities (Burhani, 2018).

In the contemporary era, pesantren continue to strengthen cosmopolitan Islam by engaging with globalization, digital communication, and international academic

cooperation (Tan, 2014). Institutional collaborations with universities and Islamic organizations abroad have enabled pesantren scholars to participate in global discussions concerning peace, democracy, religious moderation, and intercultural dialogue (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Scholars argue that pesantren maintain their relevance because they successfully combine traditional Islamic scholarship with openness toward global knowledge and social transformation (Hefner, 2011). At the same time, pesantren preserve local cultural traditions and spiritual values that distinguish Indonesian Islam from more exclusivist forms of religious expression (Kersten, 2015). Therefore, the historical continuity of pesantren networks demonstrates that Indonesian pesantren have consistently shaped a strong and enduring practice of cosmopolitan Islam rooted in both local traditions and global engagement (Burhani, 2018).

Islamic Cosmopolitanism of Pesantren: Unique Contribution to the Muslim World

The cosmopolitanism of Indonesian pesantren represents a distinctive model of Islamic civilization that combines strong religious commitment with openness toward cultural diversity and global engagement (Hefner, 2009). Academic studies show that pesantren developed within plural social environments where Islam interacted closely with local traditions, ethnic diversity, and national identity (Azra, 2004). Unlike many exclusivist religious institutions, pesantren emphasize coexistence, communal harmony, and accommodation of local cultures within Islamic practice (Bruinessen, 2013). Historical documents indicate that pesantren scholars maintained intellectual relations with global Islamic centers while preserving indigenous Indonesian cultural values (Dhofier, 2011). This combination of local rootedness and global connectivity became one of the unique characteristics that enabled pesantren to contribute significantly to the development of cosmopolitan Islam in the Muslim world (Kersten, 2015).

One unique contribution of pesantren cosmopolitanism is its ability to integrate traditional Islamic scholarship with modern educational systems without creating sharp contradictions between religion and modernity (Tan, 2014). Gontor, for example, introduced multilingual education, international orientation, and organizational discipline while preserving pesantren ethics and spiritual traditions (Lukens-Bull, 2005). Scholars argue that this synthesis enabled pesantren graduates to participate actively in global intellectual networks while maintaining Islamic moral values and Indonesian cultural identity (Hefner, 2009). Institutional reports further show that pesantren students are encouraged to engage with contemporary issues such as democracy, globalization, and intercultural dialogue through Islamic perspectives (Burhani, 2018). This educational model demonstrates that Islamic institutions can embrace modernity and globalization without abandoning religious authenticity (Kersten, 2015).

Another unique aspect of pesantren cosmopolitanism is its strong emphasis on moderation and religious tolerance within plural societies (Bush, 2009). Tebuireng and Nahdlatul Ulama traditions, for instance, promote the concept of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which encourages peaceful coexistence and social justice for all communities regardless of religious background (Fealy, 1998). Scholars note that pesantren communities actively participate in interfaith dialogue, humanitarian activities, and peacebuilding initiatives at both national and international levels (Wahid, 2007). Historical evidence also indicates that pesantren leaders played important roles in defending democracy, pluralism, and national unity during periods of political conflict in Indonesia (Barton, 2002). This commitment to

moderation and inclusiveness distinguishes pesantren cosmopolitanism from more rigid and exclusivist interpretations of Islam found in some other Muslim societies (Bruinessen, 2013).

Pesantren cosmopolitanism is also unique because it developed through transnational intellectual networks while remaining deeply connected to local communities (Azra, 2004). Indonesian ulama studied in Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and other global Islamic centers before transmitting their knowledge through pesantren education upon returning home (Laffan, 2003). Rather than adopting Middle Eastern Islamic traditions in a rigid manner, pesantren scholars adapted global Islamic teachings to local cultural contexts and social realities (Hefner, 2000). This process produced a flexible and culturally inclusive form of Islam that values both religious orthodoxy and social accommodation (Kersten, 2015). Consequently, pesantren became examples of how Islamic globalization can coexist with cultural diversity and local wisdom (Burhani, 2018).

The reformist intellectual tradition represented by Sumatera Thawalib contributed another important dimension to pesantren cosmopolitanism through its emphasis on rationality and educational reform (Abdullah, 1971). Influenced by reformist thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, Sumatera Thawalib encouraged critical engagement with issues of colonialism, nationalism, and modern science (Noer, 1973). Scholars argue that this intellectual openness enabled Indonesian Muslims to engage constructively with global modernity without losing their Islamic identity (Azra, 2004). Historical studies further demonstrate that graduates of Sumatera Thawalib became influential intellectuals and nationalist leaders who promoted progressive Islamic thought in Southeast Asia (Laffan, 2003). This reformist orientation strengthened the global relevance of Indonesian pesantren as centers of intellectual renewal within the Muslim world (Kersten, 2015).

Another distinctive contribution of pesantren cosmopolitanism lies in its ethical and communal orientation that prioritizes humility, social solidarity, and moral responsibility (Dhofier, 2011). Pesantren educational traditions emphasize close relationships between teachers and students, communal living, and spiritual discipline as essential elements of Islamic learning (Hefner, 2009). Scholars observe that these traditions create inclusive Muslim communities that value cooperation, empathy, and social engagement rather than individualism or ideological rigidity (Bruinessen, 2013). Institutional reports also indicate that many pesantren are actively involved in community development, environmental programs, disaster relief, and humanitarian initiatives (Burhani, 2018). This socially grounded approach demonstrates that pesantren cosmopolitanism is not limited to intellectual discourse but is also reflected in practical contributions to society and humanity (Tan, 2014).

In the contemporary global context, pesantren continue to strengthen their cosmopolitan contribution through international academic collaboration, digital communication, and global peace initiatives (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Scholars argue that Indonesian pesantren are increasingly recognized internationally as models of moderate Islamic education capable of balancing tradition, democracy, and pluralism (Hefner, 2011). Their experiences in integrating local culture, religious moderation, and global engagement provide valuable lessons for Muslim societies facing challenges of extremism and social polarization (Kersten, 2015). At the same time, pesantren maintain

their unique identity by preserving classical Islamic scholarship, communal ethics, and local wisdom within modern educational systems (Azra, 2004). Therefore, the cosmopolitanism of Indonesian pesantren represents a unique and enduring contribution to the global Muslim world by demonstrating that Islam can remain faithful to its traditions while actively engaging with cultural diversity and global modernity (Burhani, 2018).

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that pesantren networks in Indonesia have played a crucial role in shaping a strong and enduring tradition of cosmopolitan Islam through educational reform, intellectual exchange, and transnational scholarly connections. The findings reveal that pesantren such as Gontor, Tebuireng, and Sumatera Thawalib successfully integrated local Islamic traditions with global Islamic discourses while maintaining their distinct cultural and religious identities. The study also finds that key figures including KH Imam Zarkasyi, KH Hasyim Asy'ari, Abdurrahman Wahid, Haji Rasul, and Mahmud Yunus significantly contributed to the development of moderate, inclusive, and globally engaged Islamic thought in Indonesia. Through alumni networks, institutional cooperation, and intellectual traditions, pesantren established sustainable connections linking Indonesian Islam with the wider Muslim world. Another important finding is that pesantren cosmopolitanism is characterized by its unique ability to combine traditional Islamic scholarship, local wisdom, modern education, and openness toward cultural diversity simultaneously. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of modernist, traditionalist, and reformist pesantren within the framework of cosmopolitan Islam and transnational intellectual networks. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on pesantren as local religious institutions, this research highlights pesantren as dynamic global actors contributing to international Islamic discourse and intercultural engagement. The study further contributes theoretically by offering a broader understanding of cosmopolitan Islam as a socially grounded and culturally adaptive Islamic practice shaped through pesantren networks. Practically, this research confirms that pesantren can serve as important models for promoting moderation, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence within contemporary Muslim societies facing globalization and religious polarization. Therefore, this study concludes that Indonesian pesantren represent a unique and influential contribution to the global Muslim world by demonstrating how Islam can harmoniously connect local tradition, intellectual openness, and global engagement.

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