

# DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY: THE CASE OF PONDOK MODERN GONTOR

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**Abstract:** The debate about the image of *pesantren*, considered far from modernity, has become a new intellectual space that can be started through a post-modernism perspective. The thought later brings forth an alternative understanding of modernity itself because the Pondok Modern Gontor has proven that a number of its cadres can adapt optimally to modernity and technology so that their capabilities are widely recognized globally. Therefore, this article explores how the postmodernism approach concerning the study of international relations science which has strong relevance to postcolonial conditions, takes fundamental control over the ongoing modernization, especially in the field of technology in a traditional religious education institution like Pondok Modern Gontor, so that it can be categorized in Alternative Modernity. Furthermore, the writing of this article uses a qualitative method with a literature study that allows further research to be needed. This article concludes that Pondok Modern Gontor has succeeded in offering a strong combination of Indonesian and Islamic characters as an *alternative modernity* to the Islamic education system in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Pesantren*; postmodernism; Gontor; alternative modernity.

## Introduction

Indonesia has a long history of crossing the civilization of its people's lives. From the monarchy and colonialism until now in the modern era. In Indonesia, modernity occurred after the colonization of Western nations, which had stopped until the mid-20th century. Indonesia is currently going through a modernization phase in its postcolonial journey. Moreover, that is what makes our

paradigm of modernity today different from the understanding of Modernity assumed by society in the past. According to Giddens,<sup>1</sup> in the past, everyone was still living a 'local life,' and the boundaries of the body ensured that all individuals were, at all times, contextually placed in space and time. Nevertheless, the transformation of place and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the radically mediated centrality of experience, has led to a shift in understanding the real 'world.' Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenon or Modernity has become global. Now we cannot escape our connection to what has spread globally. Modernization also refers to the growth of a society, which can be characterized as progress toward a set of general goals that are clearly defined and related to the particular characteristic of the people who live in the modern nations in the modern world.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, we must understand the spread of global Modernity in terms of the continuing relationship between distance and chronic mutability.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the scattered influence of Modernity can still positively impact social changes that occur in society.

However, to think about modernity, according to Arjun Appadurai, we should study all the sites of Modernity under the same conditions. Most societies today possess the means of local modernity. As their members move around the world, these experiences inform and inflect one another, thus making even the paradigmatic modernity of the United States and Western Europe (the assumption itself is not problematic) no more pristine.<sup>4</sup> Thus, to understand the wandering meaning of modernity, modernity has traveled from the West to the rest of the world in sundry aspects, also in the form of discourse that interrogates the present.<sup>5</sup> So, the

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 187.

<sup>2</sup> T. Dos Santos, "The Crisis of Development Theory and the Problem of Dependency in Latin America," in *Underdevelopment and Development*, ed. H. Bernstein (Australia: Penguin Books, 1978), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in South Asian World* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Dilip P. Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), 14.

postcolonial discourse becomes an essential ornament in any research on modernity. Because regardless of to social environment of the former colony cannot be separated from colonial influences.

In *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Arif Dirlik refers to criticism of the idealistic reconfiguration of global relations under the conditions of what can be summed up as global postmodernism. Dirlik also traces a certain affinity with postmodernity and postcolonialism, that contemporary radicalism should take local struggles as a starting point and that indigenism as a type of identity formation can be a suitable model for such struggles. Local struggles are already part of the global political landscape, not for fortuitous reasons. The difference between the local and it in postcolonial critique must be made clear in its insistence only in terms of a global. It is anchored in another type of knowledge, not that of the exile or the itinerant theoretician, but local knowledge informed and aligned with the construction of the local community.<sup>6</sup> This diffuse flow of modernization offers space for postmodernism to create new discourses that link local identities with the proper needs of modernity.

This article begins with the old modernism thought, putting the position of local identity only as an object, coupled with their complete belief in the Age of Enlightenment which also discriminated against religious cohorts. So then, it becomes interesting to discuss the phenomenon of the local education and religion system with modernization which can meet modernism criteria, who crave the materialism paradigm. This article is rooted in the postmodern reverie, which wants to commemorate the plurality meanings of language games—followed by a postmodernist view of this phenomenon that occurs in a local education system specifically. Then, an explanation of the modernization process in a local scope will become proof of the critique of modernism.

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<sup>6</sup> Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* (1994), 1.

## The Defiance of Modernization

Modernization in historical studies plays a role in using relevant media or learning resources.<sup>7</sup> The presence of the West in Muslim countries through colonialism also introduced modern cultures such as science, militarism, modern trading systems, international relations, fashion, lifestyles, and even modern education systems.<sup>8</sup> It is not easy, especially for traditional education systems such as *pondok pesantren* (hereinafter referred to as *pesantren*), to respond to the current wave of modernization. Most of the Indonesian population underestimates the existence of *pesantren*, considered outside the line of modernization. This educational institution has even been seen as an educational institution that is identical to the sarong, traditional, backward, old-fashioned, slum, et cetera.<sup>9</sup> Even though historically, *pesantren* has played its role as a bulwark against colonialism. Even today, *pesantren* is still a place for the younger generation to acquire life skills to maintain their existence in society. The existence of *pesantren* until now has proven its success in responding to the challenges of the times.<sup>10</sup> However, as stated by Azyumardi Azra and Karel Steenbrink, the wave of transformation and modernization in education threatens the existence of traditional Islamic educational institutions.<sup>11</sup> This is a severe challenge for traditional Islamic educational institutions such as *pesantren* to survive in this era of globalization.

Modernization studies would be appropriate to associate it with the term westernization, which is a label in the aspect of globalization. Both terms are used both in Indonesian discourse and in Western scholarship. It is not surprising, then, that many *pesantren* people associate this process of modernization and

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<sup>7</sup> G.G. Sasmita, "The Importance of Postcolonialism in Learning History Amid the Challenges of Globalization," *International Conference on Technology, Education, and Social Science: the 2<sup>nd</sup> ICTESS*, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Hanun Asrohah, "The Dynamics of Pesantren: Responses toward Modernity and Mechanism in Organizing Transformation," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 05, No. 01 (June, 2011), 66-90.

<sup>9</sup> Zuhri, "Globalization and Pesantren's Response," *Tadrib*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (December, 2016), 1-21.

<sup>10</sup> Asrohah, "The Dynamics of Pesantren."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

globalization with the loss of traditional values.<sup>12</sup> With the adoption of modernization from the West by the political elite as a priority value, religion has only acquired a more limited role in the public sphere. This can be proven by the findings in the realm of education, where the establishment of a traditional religious education system is quite inversely proportional to the modern education system.<sup>13</sup> This skepticism is also driven by the view that “modern” oriented individuals tend not to have strong beliefs about religious issues and institutions. Some studies suggest that individuals with strong religious beliefs should hold traditional rather than modern attitudes. Another study also mentioned that modernization negatively correlates with religiosity at the national level.<sup>14</sup>

However, this paradigm is increasingly melting away as more *santri* (namely students in *pesantren*) and *pesantren* graduates show their existence in modern labels. Call it Nurcholis Majdid (Muslim scholar and expert on modernism), Kalend Osen (founder of *Kampung England* in Pare, Kediri), Ahmad Fuadi (journalist, novelist and the winner of Education UK Alumni Award 2016), to the most recent Muhammad Syakir Arif, one of Indonesia’s representatives at Google I/O 2019. Google I/O 2019 is the largest annual conference held by Google in Mountain View, California, United States. A prestigious technology event attended by people from various countries. Interestingly, many previously mentioned names are graduates from the same educational institution, namely Pondok Modern Darussalam, Gontor (hereinafter referred to as Pondok Modern Gontor). Indeed, Gontor has officially claimed its institution as a modern Islamic school.<sup>15</sup> However, Gontor still strongly applies the traditional Islamic education system if

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Lukens-Bull, “Teaching Morality: Javanese Islamic Education in Globalizing Era,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 3 (2000), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Meir Hatina, “Restoring a Lost Identity: Models of Education in Modern Islamic Thought,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2006), 179-197.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia M. Sexton, Gary Leak, and Frederick Toenies, “Relationship of Locus of Control and Modernity to Certainty of Religious Beliefs,” *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1980), 1285-1286.

<sup>15</sup> Iik Arifin Mansurnoor, “Response of Southeast Asian Muslims to the Increasingly Globalized World: Discourse and Action,” *Haul*, No. 5 (2004), 103-111.

explored more deeply. Gontor and society have different understandings of the meaning of “modern.” Lance Castles, in his research, stated that society gave the term “modern” to Gontor because of its unique nature and different from traditional cottages and modern schools in general.<sup>16</sup> Gontor is a *pesantren* that has its characteristics. It distinguishes itself from traditional *pesantren*, creating a different atmosphere to produce graduates with different characteristics.

This phenomenon becomes interesting when amid the globalization, a traditional Islamic educational institution in Indonesia can maintain traditional values while accepting some of the appropriate modernity. According to Lukens-Bull (2000), every local *pesantren* setting embodies a response to localized modernity and the “modernity” that is recreated by that arrangement. This argument is one of the reasons why Gontor’s governance of modernity arrangements with the scattering of modernity can be categorized under the concept of “*alternative modernity*.” The idea of *alternative modernity* is an understanding of modernization that does not lead to the cloning of society according to western style or westernization. In addition, Dirlik (2013) also implies the following views:

The conceptual premises of “alternative modernity” are relatively straightforward, at least on the surface. First is the acknowledgment of Modernity as a global presence with universal claims, without which it would make little sense to speak of “alternatives.” In the words of the editor of a volume on the subject, “to think in terms of ‘alternative modernities’ is to admit that Modernity is inescapable and to desist from speculations about the end of modernity... Modernity is now everywhere.” We may add that “everywhere” may also imply nowhere and, therefore, the end of modernity, but more on that below.

Through this rationale, various processes, acculturation and system transformation, elements of values, norms, characteristics, and many other things will become the controlling actors of the modernization process itself. This becomes very interesting, considering that combining two cultural characters between modern and traditional is not an easy thing. Especially in the

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<sup>16</sup> Lance Castles, “Notes on the Islamic School at Gontor,” *Indoensia*, No. 1 (April 1966), 30-45.

current era of globalization, this kind of flow control is no longer easy to do. This article discusses how postmodernism approaches concerning the study of international relations science which has strong relevance to postcolonial conditions that take fundamental control over the ongoing modernization, especially in the field of technology in a traditional religious education institution Pondok Modern Gontor, so that it can be categorized in 'alternative modernity.'

### **The Postmodernism Perspective**

The study of Modernity in ex-colonial countries is closely related to the concentration of colonial domination and the legacy of colonialism or what we often understand as postcolonial. Moreover, as a country with an immense Muslim majority in the world, Modernity that occurs in Indonesia seems increasingly challenging to develop because it is impossible to separate from the imprinted concepts of Modernity that have developed in the West. Especially in social and cultural analysis, modernity is generally said to refer to the characteristics of the capitalist industry that have developed in the West since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, gradually weakening the traditional system of thought.<sup>17</sup> In the practice of social analysis, phenomena that link social processes such as urbanization, secularization, and westernization with cultural ideals such as freedom, happiness, progress, et cetera. However, this characterization will always complicate the concept because both are material.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the meeting between the westernization process in the traditional sphere becomes a conceptual discourse in line with the most basic postmodernist ethical arguments. That is, concerning the relationship between discourse and power.<sup>19</sup> Butler's meaning of 'discourse' refers to a series of interrelated and historically developed statements that can define and describe the subject of discussion. In the previous explanation, the general discourse that developed in society regarding the modernity of the Pondok Modern Gontor is a

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<sup>17</sup> Jaafar Aksikas, *Introduction: Arab Modernities: Islamism, Nationalism, and Liberalism in the Post-colonial Arab World* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Butler, *Post-modernism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 44.

traditional identity that can be proven from historical developments, which are dominated by traditional and conservative elements. In this regard, postmodernists believe this general discourse is a truth shaped by social construction. Besides, the Pondok Modern Gontor also has traces of westernization in this postcolonial period, for example, the use of blazers and pants in the *pesantren* environment. This postmodernist rejection of the public premise is also based on the essential character of those who see reality in a semiotic manner. Although postmodernists may be able to define a small perspective that they consider more practical, they cannot provide a comprehensive picture of a universal study.<sup>20</sup>

Postmodernist epistemological understanding in understanding small perspectives is not firm enough to describe general arguments that can be used as a social reality. This weakness is also reinforced by Foucault's argument, which shows how the discourse of power is used in all societies to marginalize marginal or minority groups.<sup>21</sup> Butler also mentions that Foucault's argument is an extraordinary achievement in postmodernist understanding because he succeeded in explaining how the work of power, claimed by postmodernists to be able to bring about discourse or discourse, only requires a particular type of identity that everyone is affected by. As in postmodernist jargon, they '*constitute the subject*.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, it can also be concluded that in postmodernist understanding, truth is subjective because it is based on individuals' experiences, which they consider relative.

This perspective of thinking becomes interesting in postcolonial studies, especially in the case of the Pondok Modern Gontor, because there is resistance through the traditional education system against the remnants of colonialism. Various stigmas develop in the general community, such as the existence of classes in the international world that developed during colo-

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<sup>20</sup> Mathias Albert defined that despite the common denominator of postmodern philosophy is that it critiques our age's epistemology, or the way we make sense of things, and how this impacts social reality. Mathias Albert, *On Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity: An International Relations Perspective* (Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1998), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 355.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, *Post-modernism*, 50.



nialism. It is still unable to change the attitude and identity of the Pondok Modern Gontor, which can maintain traditional values while adapting and reinterpreting the continuity of the modernization process, which mostly comes from the West. Modernity, a postmodernist perspective, is a discourse or discourse created by the first world countries. Foucault also continues to emphasize how the process of discipline, normalization, and the use of power has been applied in various fields of experience in which discursive practices exist.<sup>23</sup> One of the global discursive practices regarding modernity is its ubiquitous presence which is a descendant of the Western world reality.<sup>24</sup> This assumption also underlies the thinking of the Indonesian people, who generally believe that modernity must originate from the Western world. So, it is not surprising that Western culture is dominance the leading benchmark for several postcolonial phenomena, such as the appreciation of those accepted to work or their abilities recognized by multinational technology companies like Google.

Postmodernism's basic educational assumptions are very influential, especially when closely related to truth values. There are the grand narratives that academics put forward to western origin, in any case.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, postmodernist and postcolonial criticism have similar intellectual origins in countering the genuine limitations of western-centric modernity. In addition, these two understandings also answer the critical need for questions about the ignorance of local understandings of generalized modernity and drawing attention to new problems, such as in the realm of global political and social relations.<sup>26</sup> So, it makes sense when the concept becomes a continuation of a more direct understanding of the meeting of local values with the West through modernization.

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Thing*, xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Ashcroft, "Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (January, 2009), 81-105.

<sup>25</sup> Kamaluddin MH Pasi, Rasyidin, Radinal Mukhtar Harahap, Education System of Modern Islamic Boarding School in the Postmodern Era," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2020), 311-323.

<sup>26</sup> Dirlik (1998) describes postcolial criticism which provides an example of how cultural criticism, through its unbridled expansion of scope, can exhaust its critical energy to end up in an uncritical and narcissistic celebration of rockyness.

It is not surprising then that these two criticisms of the concept also create intellectual space in voicing *alternative modernity*, which denies the possibility of the authenticity of claims to collective identity.

### ***Pondok Modern Gontor: Modernity and Technology***

“*Pesantren*” is a term for traditional religious and educational institutions in Indonesia that existed even before the colonial period. The word “*pesantren*” is rooted in the word “*santri*” which means people who study scriptures or science in Sanskrit.<sup>27</sup> In some Western literature, the term is referred to as ‘religious seminaries,’ which is assumed to be similar to seminaries or monasteries found in Christianity or Catholicism.<sup>28</sup> However, unlike seminaries or monasteries, *pesantren* graduates are not oriented to become religious leaders because one of the Ḥadīths of the Prophet Muḥammad *lā rubūbiyah fī al-Islām* means there is no clerical institution in Islam. As a traditional educational institution, *pesantren* is very closely related to the general public view that this institution is still far from modernization. As time goes by, *pesantren* in Indonesia are now starting to adapt to the current globalization, which brings several new entities in the modernization process, such as technology. In addition, *pesantren* also plays a significant role in spreading Islam to local communities in Indonesia. Even *pesantren* have also been seen as one of the greatest Islamic heritages and play a significant role in maintaining Islamic traditions.<sup>29</sup>

Nowadays, *pesantren* are widely understood as conservative institutions in the modern era and as reservoirs of cultural values and morality. Even because of their long-standing existence, *pesantren* are believed not to have inherited the education system

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<sup>27</sup> *Pesantren* is also often combined with the word *pondok* which comes from the Arabic sentence *funduq*, which means dormitory or residence. So when combined, Islamic boarding schools are often assumed to refer to “Islamic Religious Boarding Schools.”

<sup>28</sup> Win Ushuluddin, *Sintesa Pendidikan Islam Asia-Afrika* (Yogyakarta: Paradigma, 2002), 32.

<sup>29</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning,” in *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. Wolfgang Marshall (Berne: University of Berne, 1994), 23.

from the colonial era and are purely Indonesian products.<sup>30</sup> However, when the colony began to dominate, *pesantren*, as an original product of culture, also took a stand against colonialism. It was not uncommon for *pesantren* to shift their conservative public image to equate themselves with the colonies as has been done by the Pondok Modern Gontor, which applies a culture of wearing a Western-style blazer (as one of the Western products) but still combined it with a *sarong*.<sup>31</sup>

The phenomenon of the transformation of conditions from traditional to modern must have an impact on the communities that live in it. The discussion about the modernization process in the *pesantren* environment becomes an exciting topic to continue to be studied because the *marwah* of *pesantren*, from the perspective of Indonesian society, generally has an inherent traditional identity. Then, a contradiction occurs when the modernity model accepted by traditional religious education institutions such as the Pondok Modern Gontor after colonialism remains under the agency's control. Moreover, in the modernization process, one of which includes the field of technology, many philosophers, such as Andrew Feenberg, criticized technological Modernity.<sup>32</sup> Feenberg argues that Modernity, as we know it today, was built through rationalization. Alternative rationalization is needed to create *alternative modernities*. Rationality itself is the first element that starts human consciousness in understanding the reality that is happening. At this point, we can see some rational phenomena, one of which can be seen through alums of Pondok Modern Gontor whose technological skills, namely Muhammad Syakir Arif, have been recognized by the multinational company Google.

Suppose we know the traditional characters attached to the Pondok Modern Gontor. When we know this phenomenon occurs, we all may have the same rational thinking, namely, how this phenomenon can occur. Thus, the fundamental premise that

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<sup>30</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Bilik-Bilik Pesantren: Sebuah Potret Perjalanan* (Jakarta: Penerbit Paramadina, 1997), 72.

<sup>31</sup> KBBI: a *Sarong* is a cover or wrapping cloth. In relation to Islamic boarding schools, the sarong is identified with a box-shaped cloth with a sleeve which is traditionally used for worship or daily activities.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

there must be a system of different approaches to understanding technology within the institution must have crossed our minds. Our minds will indeed begin to interpret the traditional meaning of *pesantren* towards modernity. The basic premise of *alternative modernity* is easy to understand, at least if we have found some key findings. Even so, what must be understood is that there is an opportunity to create an alternative hypothesis based on postcolonial influences, which have been widely considered western-centric so that there is an opportunity in the realm of Postmodernism to explore the multidimensional meaning of Modernity.

The meaning of ‘modern’ brought by the Pondok Modern Gontor will be easier to understand through a diachronic approach. This is because this *pesantren* was founded when Indonesia was still under Dutch colonial rule, which caused the educational needs of the people, in general, to be far from adequate for creating personal qualities with dignity and worth, as well as culture and civilization.<sup>33</sup> In the context of the Pondok Modern Gontor, the meaning of ‘modern’ means ‘beyond’ the state of the *pesantren* and all its descriptions of the world of ‘Islamic’ education at that time. If viewed diachronically, the Pondok Modern Gontor cannot be separated from the significant influence of a figure with progressive, prospective, and futuristic insight, namely a figure who is said to be able to see transparently what will happen to the next generation in the future, he is Kiai Imam Zarkasyi. He is one of the founders of the Pondok Modern Gontor.

An Egypt contemporary philosopher, Hanafi, accused Western anthropologists of constantly assuming the culture of the colonized country was a backward culture and needed to get ‘help.’ And then so many people leave the tradition that is considered outdated.<sup>34</sup> The colonizers echoed modernization to strengthen the control over the inlander nation, which gave rise to a sense of inferiority to the invaders. However, modernization is derived from local western culture, which cannot be separated from the

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<sup>33</sup> Inayatul Anisah, “Alternatif Pendidikan Masa Depan,” in Ushuluddin, *Sintesis Pendidikan Islami*, xvii-xxv.

<sup>34</sup> Hassan Hanafi, *Muqaddimah fi ‘Ilm al-Istighrāb* (Cairo: Dār al-Fannīyah, 1990).

context surrounding the local West.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the philosophical discourse on Modernity becomes very interesting to study through the phenomena at the Pondok Modern Gontor because it opens the horizon for two contradictory ideas so far.

### **Pondok Modern Gontor Redefined Technology**

The development of science and technology has become one of the most influential entities in the continuity of the modernization process. In the postcolonial context, the presence of the West in Muslim countries through colonialism has introduced new modern cultures such as science, militarism, lifestyle, fashion, and modern trading systems to modern education systems in the form of schools.<sup>36</sup> As we know, the progress of modernism in the Western world has become a general reference for people who define modernism as leading to the advancement of science and technology in the West. Moreover, entering the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, the education system must adapt to technological advances to face world challenges that were never expected.

In the context of technology, Feenberg reveals that the scientific interpretation of the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) is convincing that technical design can only be defined contextually and locally by certain technology-society relationships. Thus, it is possible to have “interpretative flexibility” in public relations with specific technologies.<sup>37</sup> However, along with the passage of Modernity and technology, there are dynamics in the identity construction process of these two things. As a traditional religious education institution that is the main face of the Islamic education system in Indonesia, Pondok Modern Gontor must adapt to technology to maintain its existence. They have their interpretation of the meaning of developing technology. Therefore, Pondok Modern Gontor set its method to ensure

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<sup>35</sup> Ahmad Natsir, “Identitas Poskolonialisme Pesantren Modern,” *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2019), 203-218.

<sup>36</sup> Asrohah, “The Dynamics of Pesantren,” 76.

<sup>37</sup> Tyler J. Veak, “Introduction,” in *Democratizing Technology: Andrew Feenberg’s Critical Theory of Technology*, ed. Tyler J. Veak (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), xiii.

ongoing modernization. Furthermore, the author classifies the two methods of adaptation of Pondok Modern Gontor into two stages.

### ***Pesantren Education System: Basic Level***

In this first stage, students or santri will undergo six years of education from elementary school graduates or four years from junior high school graduates (with one year of adjustment to basic knowledge of religion and Arabic). To be accepted into Pondok Modern Gontor, the prospective student must also go through a selection of arithmetic and the ability to read the Qur'an in Arabic.<sup>38</sup> Every year, the number of prospective students who register at the Pondok Modern Gontor reaches approximately 6000 participants.<sup>39</sup> The enthusiasm of the Indonesian people towards this institution cannot be separated from several goals and results that Gontor has successfully proved since its inception. One of the goals of establishing this *pesantren* is to provide a "cadre" for Muslims in Indonesia by combining the values of the old *pesantren* education system with modern educational theory and practice. Moreover, many educational institutions that serve as pilot models are Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Syanggit in Libya, Aligarh in India, Shantiniketan a la Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia and Taman Siswa a la Ki Hajar Dewantara in Indonesia.<sup>40</sup> The establishment of Pondok Modern Gontor is also a form of criticism from K.H. Imam Zarkasyi strongly criticized the public school education system, which had a colonial origin and spirit so that it provided inadequate moral training and was too oriented to the production of workers in general which did not instill a love of learning.

The unique characteristics of *pesantren* are spirit, sunnah, and dormitory life, with the Kiai as the leading figure and the mosque as the foremost institution. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi explained the 'spirit' in the Five Souls of Pesantren,<sup>41</sup> namely Sincerity spirit, the

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<sup>38</sup> Lance Castles said that the test of reading the Koran is only for mention, not to the stage of understanding it

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from <https://www.gontor.ac.id/tahun-ini-pendaftar-tembus-angka-7000>

<sup>40</sup> Refers to the testimony of Kiai Haji Imam Zarkasyi.

<sup>41</sup> Be defined in the speech of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi in the First Phase of the *Seminar on Islamic Boarding Schools throughout Indonesia* in Yogyakarta on 4-7 July 1964.

Spirit of Simplicity, the Spirit of Self-Help or Self-reliance, the Democratic Spirit of *ukhuwwah dīniyah* among the *santri*, and Free Spirit. This understanding of the ‘spirit’ is used as the primary basis for boarding life in *pesantrens* as an educational system. Pondok Modern Gontor implements a combination of traditional and modern education systems that generally do not involve technology, such as the internet, computers, cell phones, et cetera. Nevertheless, Pondok Modern Gontor has departed from an original idea that is not just an echo from the society at once but also a place for guarding the authentic local values.

The limited presence of technology in the education system implemented by Pondok Modern Gontor was once mentioned by the statement of the former vice president of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, in his remarks at the inauguration of the Grand Mosque of Pondok Modern Gontor, Ponorogo:<sup>42</sup> “Pondok Modern Gontor must be able to teach modernization and technology for beneficial science. Of course, modernization can have a positive or negative impact. Technology can help, such as through social media or the internet and transportation. But technology can also cause unrest.”

Furthermore, Jusuf Kalla also said several primary life educations, such as entrepreneurship, has also been taught at the *Pondok Modern Gontor*, so it is crucial to balance it with technological developments to achieve a good community life. This statement is sufficient to describe how the Gontor Islamic boarding school continues to limit the use of technology in its education system even though many people have pinned the modern designation on Gontor.

K.H. Hasan Abdullah Sahal, one of the leaders of Pondok Modern Gontor, stated that “the cottage is modern in spirit,” which means thinking integrally, advancing, not dichotomizing, fair, and respecting time efficiency.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the curriculum and lifestyle implemented by Gontor target character building (*tarbiyah*) and teaching and learning movements (*ta’lim*) that maximize human resource development. The general premise of society about modernism which is very closely related to

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<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/pendidikan/eduaction/19/10/03/pys5w0335-jk-dorong-gontor-terapkan-teknologi-di-dunia-pendidikan>.

<sup>43</sup> See <https://www.gontor.ac.id/berita/modern>.

technology makes the modern practice applied by Pondok Modern Gontor different.

In implementing the education system in the Pondok Modern Gontor, regulations regarding technology media use are still minimal. The pattern of 24-hour education is more spent on instilling knowledge about religious and social sciences.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, in one of the results of Ade Tutty's research, it was found that computer technology had indeed been applied in the *pesantren* environment. However, the computerized system did not succeed in connecting between parts of the *pesantren* environment.<sup>45</sup> According to the explanation of one of the alums of the Gontor Islamic boarding school named, Jordan Istiqlal Qalbi Adiba,<sup>46</sup> the use of technology media, especially those connected to the internet, can be said to be very limited in Pondok Modern Gontor environment. Moreover, almost all students are not allowed to be able to access the use this technology easily because the routine activity program has been arranged in such a way in Pondok Modern Gontor environment for 24 hours every day.

In addition to providing limitations on technology in its education system, Pondok Modern Gontor also uses the boarding school and day-school system patterns often found in Europe. In daily life, the education and open management pattern in its management apply Arabic and English as official languages. Even the use of Indonesian and regional languages is strictly prohibited.

### ***Islamic Boarding University: Next Level***

According to the general understanding of society, technology can be said to have only really arrived at the next level or after taking education at the Pondok Modern Gontor level for approximately four to six years. At this second level, the designation for educational institutions has changed to *pesantren*-based university because the level of education is the same as universities in general. However, the current education system is

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<sup>44</sup> Ushuluddin, *Sintesa Pendidikan Islam*, 32

<sup>45</sup> Ade Tutty Rokhayati Rosa, "Task Technology Fit and Information Quality System through the Study of Naturalistic Research Characteristics Education in PPMD Gontor," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, Vol. 1477 (2019), 12.

<sup>46</sup> Interviews with alumni conducted during Ramadhan 1443 in Surabaya.



almost the same as at the previous level, requiring all students to stay on campus for 24 hours.<sup>47</sup> Even the rector, staff, and lecturers are also on campus and are part of the dynamics of the learning system. Thus, all activities carried out by students can be controlled, coordinated, and evaluated directly.

A study examining educational technology reveals that it is important to innovate in the education technology system to make Pondok Modern Gontor highly competitive and able to produce graduates who master not only religious knowledge but also technology.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, this ambition contradicts the primary system that strictly limits technology use but places great emphasis on the formation of strong character based on religion and '*local genius*' in the style of *pesantren*. Nurcholish Madjid argues that *pesantren* is not only a natural identity of Islam in Indonesia but also an interpretation of *local genius* native to Indonesia because of its existence since the Hindu-Buddhist period. Islam continued the idea of the institution. According to Pigeaud, local genius can be defined authentically as coming from communities located in small mountains.

Moreover, in this case, Pigeaud representing Islamic institutions such as boarding schools and dormitories is one of the *local genius*.<sup>49</sup> Then, more clearly, Manfred Ziemek also emphasized this assumption because *pesantren* has become a pre-Islamic institution that has been held for centuries.<sup>50</sup> Not surprisingly, at this stage, even though every student has been allowed to bring technological tools such as laptops and cellphones, the use of these tools is still highly supervised by the Darussalam University educational institution. Internet technology that all students can access is also monitored systematically and carefully.

The tendency of *pesantren* to take control of the technology brought about by modernization is a natural response that

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<sup>47</sup> Rila Setyaningsih, Ahmad Hidayatullah Zakarsyi, Agus Budiman, Muhammad Badrun Syahir, Samsirin, "The Innovation Model of Educational Technology to Strengthen Boarding University Education in Disruptive Era," Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Business, Law and Pedagogy (ICBLP) 2019, 13-15 February 2019, Sidoarjo, Indonesia, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Setyaningsih et al., "The Innovation Model," 3.

<sup>49</sup> T.H. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java: Descriptive List of Javanese Manuscript* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 77.

<sup>50</sup> Manfred Ziemek, *Pesantren dan Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Penerbit P3M), 17.

interprets the main character of the *pesantren* itself. Not surprisingly, with the discipline applied, the sustainability of the education system that has been briefly summarized above is still being carried out consistently until now by the Pondok Modern Gontor. In line with this, the main dream of the founding of Gontor in 1926 is essentially an effort to revive the image of the cottage, which was previously considered unable to survive with the character and demands of the times.<sup>51</sup> The originality of the ideas brought by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi and his two brothers (Trimurti) in building the Gontor-style modern *pesantren* education system has pioneered the synthesis of a distinctive Indonesian education system. The application can be used as a reference for other educational institutions worldwide.

## Conclusion

The meaning of the education system pattern in Pondok Modern Gontor as Alternative Modernity refers to the fundamental postmodern premise that provides a broad space for thinking about Modernity itself. If referring to Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's explanation, Alternative Modernity is best understood as an attitude of questioning the present, which is pervasive and embattled. The pervasive attitude arises because modernity has become globalized and is embattled because of an unsolvable dilemma. These two elements represent a debate between the *pervasive* attitude of society, which considers *pesantren* as a conservative institution that is still far from modernity but surprisingly has to be clashed by some phenomena of *pesantren* graduates whose abilities in the realm of modernity, especially in the field of technology, are recognized by the pervasive attitude itself, which in the end these two contrasts are reflected in the concept of *alternative modernity*.

In facing the challenges of the modern education system, the *Pondok Modern Gontor* has succeeded in offering a strong character typical of Indonesia as an alternative to the modernity of the education system that prioritizes the readiness of individual characters before finally plunging into the relative world. With a postmodernist premise, the idea of *alternative modernity* embodied by the Pondok Modern Gontor proves that technology which has

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<sup>51</sup> Ushuluddin, *Sintesa Pendidikan Islam*, 15.

been widely regarded as the primary tool for the realization of modernity has turned out to be a dilemma in the meaning of modernity itself. The dilemma that occurs is a premise that is justified by postmodernism. Because postmodernism explicitly states that philosophy will face a metaphysical crisis when the narrative function loses its function. This thinking cannot accept the general assumption regarding the relationship between modernity and technology.

An intellectual figure, who is also referred to be a pioneer in postmodernism studies, Jacques Derrida also has a concern for the dismantling of Western culture. He also said that this demolition by Western Culture has disturbed, delayed, and damaged the main categories of criticism and dissection, which led to exposing the domination of Western institutions based on hegemony, exploitation, colonization, westernization, and exclusion. Therefore, these Postmodernism assumptions become a significant foothold in the development of alternative modernity, reflecting the rejected notion of objective truth (truth in Modernity). Because Postmodern believe that the truth and knowledge of reality depend on our understanding and representation of reality. If it is related to the postmodernism assumptions in international relations, Postmodernism focuses on producing the idea of the power-knowledge relationship, which rejects the notion of “absolute truth,” which is the principle of positivism. So, when the tendency of society towards the truth about Modernity has always been assumed to be oriented to West culture and closely related to technology. Furthermore, it is being attracted because these common assumptions about Modernity can be refuted by a modest phenomenon of local genius culture in Indonesia.

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