

Lasqi and the Questions on Islamic Women Leadership¹

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Abstract

Lasqi (Lembaga Seni Qasidah Indonesia) as a movement has a patron-client relationship with the New Order in supporting the Islamizing of Indonesia. It has a goal (and to some extent, still is) to present government programs so that they were in accordance with the norms and values of Islam for Indonesia. Early in Indonesian *qasidah* history, the significant female role cannot be overlooked, recalling the relatively important role of women as musicians in traditional Southeast Asian ritual. Zulkarnain (2004, xviii) noted that in the middle of the 1960s, Nur Aisyah Djamil from North Sumatra established the first *qasidah* group which she named “nasyid”, the acronym of her name. It is worth noting a prominent figure in *qasidah* development Tuti Alawiyah, a former leader of Asyafiyah pesantren, who played a great role in setting up Lasqi movement. The New Order insistence on “proper roles” for women as wives, and mothers meant that *qasidah* became part of the apparatus of the gender arrangement of New Order Era in which the performing arts were not exempt. The emergence of *modern nasyid* movement from the ‘tarbiyah’ movement since early of 1990’s (*Gatra*, September 2010, p.80) which is in a certain degree always oppose the modernist and government’s imaged of being Muslim woman, obviously has challenges the Lasqi’s image of ideal Indonesian Muslimah. This preliminary research paper tries to see: How does the gender content of *qasidah* and nasyid relate to Islamic attitudes towards the performing arts? How are women represented in *qasidah* and modern nasyid performance? How does the audience respond to gender relations as revealed in *qasidah* and *modern nasyid*, both in performance and the lyrical texts? The material is drawn primarily from Java, Kalimantan, and Aceh, and is based on field research, visual recordings and interviews with several figures who have long been involved in *qasidah* and *modern nasyid* as leaders, trainers, or performers. The contemporary Islamic music performance known as *Music Religi Populer* (popular religious music) that seems overwhelmed the recent market is worth to note as the impact of popular image on ideal muslimah that is proposed by *qasidah* and *modern nasyid*.

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A. Introduction



It was actually under the New Order regime that *qasidah* was introduced as Indonesian Islamic art to the whole bureaucracy and was/is initiated and nurtured in the state's educational institutions (in extracurricular)². Even though *qasidah* has been identified as rural music, particularly santri (student of pesantren) village-based, because of its social function, the development of *qasidah* is urban cultural centered. The top down approach and control can be seen in its intention of establishing Lasqi in order to regulate the artistic perception of *qasidah rebana* systematically. The structure of the organization has been conducted from a small unit of *kelurahan* (ward), *kecamatan* (subdistrict), *walikota* (mayor), and *provinsi* (province). Jakarta provided guidance for other area organizations and artistic development through the forming of a national managerial unit, Dewan Pimpinan Pusat (The Board of Central Leadership). The process of guiding and controlling *qasidah* is conducted by regular national and regional practitioner training and leader meetings under government budget.

As a movement, Lasqi is supporting Islamic music, and benefited from a kind of patron-client relationship with the New Order.³ Its goal was (and still is) to present government

²Since 2008, in Aceh, under the euphoria of Syariah spirit it seems 'Qasidah Masuk Kurikulum Sekolah' *Serambi Indonesia*. 2008. <http://serambinews.com/old/cetak.php?aksi=cetak&beritaid=41983> Edisi: 04/02/2008 08:47:15

³The *qasidah rebana* group is actually already spread in Indonesian pesantren-muslim based society but in order to become Lasqi perhaps is a new story. Information received from Bambang Hambali, the current chief of Lasqi DKI Jaya, revealed that Jakarta had an initiative to organize *qasidah* in its area by establishing Lasqi DKI Jaya (Special Autonomous Capital City District) in September 20, 1970. It became the national remarked of the founding of Indonesian lasqi through the recognition of three government ministries (Religious Affairs, Education and Culture, and Internal Affairs) Later on, many of them associated with Lasqi central and their regional patron (Gubernur/Bupati/walikota) in two ways:

programs so that they were in accordance with the norms and values of Islam. Today the activists are mostly composed of women, but from the 1970s until the early 80s men dominated this movement. In the mainstream performance of Islamic music there is a clear differentiation between male and female, both in physical terms and also in the lyrics considered appropriate. However, the flexibility of these conventions in Lasqi illuminates the nuances of moderate Islam in Indonesia by showing how performances of the same musical genre can reflect different cultural contexts.

The national festival has been a parameter of dynamic growth, since it has meant that artistic and Islamic values related to the performance criteria have been standardized by the national committee. Besides regulation of the artistic standard, national committee also decided songs will be played in the competition. This way, the central board has a mechanism to socialize national agenda systematically from the center to the periphery. In many cases national and local governments gave support to the organization financially and ‘politically’ (i.e. bureaucratically), in return for which government developmental programs were effectively transmitted to the public. This is in tune with the national agenda of Lasqi, as seen in the Lasqi mission, which is “to increase archipelagic principle (*wawasan nusantara*) or nationalistic viewpoint”. In addition, government support to Lasqi shows the government’s cultural politics. Indeed, its role in popularizing Islam had been carried out long before the establishment of ICMI (Indonesian association of Islamic intellectuals) to gain Muslim support. In short, this paper will explore the

initiatively guided by the Lasqi central officials or by themselves in approaching the authority. It is worth to note that Lasqi get their primary funds activities through the APBD (government regional budgets). It could be noted that Lasqi itself initially started by the rebana qasidah by the initiative of Tuty Allawiyah but in the long run it consist also other Islamic musical arts such as Nasyid Qasidah-Maulidur Rasul- Marawis- Haderah/Rudat, the last two mentions is more male domination preferences. In addition, before legitimating Lasqi establishment in 1979, in fact, since 1963 Tutty Alawiyah, one of the initial founders of Lasqi, was actively introduced qasidah rebana to Majelis Taklim. Afterward, majelis taklim became such a base of qasidah group development.

Lasqi role as the agent of change in Islamizing Indonesia, where Muslim women play an important role in transforming the State.

B. Gender and Qasidah

Browne's (2000) research on "The Gender Implications of Dangdut Kampungan: Indonesia 'low-class' Popular Music" examines the role of dangdut in gender construction. In reference to previous studies of Dangdut by Pioquinto (1993; 1995), Browne questioned whether dangdut performances have the power to challenge or to strengthen gender construction. Regarding female sexuality in the stage, Browne also discussed whether the dangdut singer represents the emancipation or the exploitation of women. Heryanto (2008, 10) analyses the phenomenon of Inul Daratista, a villager who gained the spotlight in a relatively short time and trigger considerable controversy because of her "sensational" performance, as an expression of political contestation of pop culture. This issue is linked to the concept of social embodiment as Connell (2007, 47) mentioned that the body can be regarded as an object and agent of social practice in the same time.

As mentioned before, the influence from the Middle East meant that both *qasidah* and *gambus* were commonly identified as Islamic music. However, Berg made a contrast between *gambus* and *qasidah*. The difference was mainly located in their function. She argues that, unlike *qasidah*, the main function of modern *gambus* is not *dakwah*, but entertainment and social function.⁴ Even though *gambus* lyrics often include Arabic, they do not mainly function as a medium for worshipping God because of the secular meaning of the songs. Berg's distinction of *qasidah* and *gambus*- also highlighted the main character of *qasidah* as "musik dakwah Islami"

⁴ Although that is true but in grass roots reality there is also a conscious tendency to make any of art performance as vehicle of dakwah, as what many Gambus groups and Rhoma Irama's dangdut did.

(Berg 2007, 526; further important and useful issue on this see Rasmussen, 2010, 166-210). Berg's article missed to consider the role of Lasqi in developing Indonesian *qasidah*, in fact the *gambus* and *qasidah* groups that Berg discussed were focus on its popular phenomenon in its performance. While emphasized on MTQ, and women reciter of Quran, Rasmussen missed the socio and political dynamics of Lasqi in general which are there in the ordinary believers of muslim that is indirectly connected with *pesantren*.⁵

Beside the messages of the song, the performance also becomes a significant characteristic of *qasidah* as written in *Ummat*, February 19, 1996, as cited by Sumarsono (1998, 20). *Qasidah*, it is said, is "a kind of religious music which is performed respectfully and quietly so the audience will be able to find themselves in a calm mental space". That notion of *qasidah* was particularly directed to the legendary *qasidah* group, Bimbo. For the purpose of touching people's hearts, Bimbo challenged the convention of the *qasidah*, which at that time was performed by Arabic songs accompanied by rebana. Bimbo was criticized because they used piano which is identified as a non-Islamic instrument by some Muslim groups, yet in fact at that time many of modern *Qasidah* groups (commonly known as *Qasidah gambus* or *Orkes Melayu* [Malay Orchestra]), such as *Nasyida Ria* of Semarang (founded in 1970s), *Nida Ria*, and etcetera, already used those modern instruments. More importantly, Bimbo's effort to create and urban image of *qasidah* can be related to the spirit of Islamic resurgence among urban dwellers in the 1980s as Huntington pointed out (1996, 101).

Rahmat (2005, 82) describes various expressions of Islamic resurgence: implementation Islamic law, replacing western law products, Arabic language and symbolic

⁵ Rasmussen's work is focus more in women recited Quran environment with their musical aesthetic and taste rather than on Lasqi (p.182) or Nasyid (p.203) in general.

usage, broadening Islamic education, practicing Islamic teaching related to social behavior, emerging religious activities, opposition by Islamic groups to secular government, and the development of Muslim solidarity among Muslim society and Muslim countries. On the one hand, the Islamic resurgence provided a favorable atmosphere for *qasidah* to become more popular at various social levels. On the other hand, it also tightened the performing instruction, particularly for females. Moreover, in the spirit of Islamic resurgence, New Order Era, religion and state collaborated to emphasize a patriarchal perspective on gender and sexuality, such as reinforcing female domesticity (Heryanto 2008, 39; Robinson, 2009, 68). Despite this fact, as Effendy (2008, 24) argued, the relation between *fatwa* (policy made by religious authority) and female performers are not uncontested.

Female performers actively built strategies as negotiation efforts in manner familiar to those who study the politics of marginality. On the other hand, examinations on the relation between piety and politics by looking at women and piety movement as Rinaldo (2010; see also Mahmood's 2005; Van Doorn-Harder 2006) pointed out show that women participation does not always increase gender equality since state control on womanhood discourse reinforces conservative gender norms. However, this research is not intended to focus on conflict and struggle on the hegemony-resistance framework. As suggested by Baranovitch (2003, 9), the relationship between popular culture, the state, and society should not be simplified by limitation on domination and resist attempt since "human being are engaged in a 'multiple of projects'".

The significance of popular culture, in this case popular music, in the construction of a gender regime is supported by Prabasmoro's (2006) analysis of the representation of sex and female sexuality in the contemporary global culture. Prabosmoro argued that popular culture, as part of myth, contributes to the construction and control of women's sexuality by turning

something that is cultural and historic into something “natural”. As mentioned previously, the nature of genre music is influenced by its gendered location. The nature of a musical genre is much more influenced by the history of music in its social context. Hence, this research will explore the issues of women as agency of gender construction in Qasidah art performance and the State relation as their patron-client as theoretical framework.

On Being Women in Qasidah

Rasmussen (2010) has traced the roots of this qasidah rebana, she argued that the qasidah rebana was much influenced by prominently the Egyptian (p.8) and Yemeni (p.177) through oral praxis, “although musical aesthetics, instruments, and techniques may be traced to Muslim communities from throughout South and Southeast Asia”. As a hybrid culture, *qasidah* can be regarded as an effort to negotiate the global religious order which exerts such influence on gender relationships. In this sense, the following section will give particular attention to the emic perspective of believers, which represent their ideas of a pious life and their daily practices as individuals and as members of a religious community.

The gender implications of *qasidah* are related to its characteristics and its functions in society. Together with its place in the genre of religious music, its lyrics are one of *qasidah*'s most important elements. Through the lyrics, religious values are internalized by its adherents. *Qasidah* also functions as a pious expression, as seen in praise songs. Furthermore, *qasidah* does not only have religious purposes. It is also intended for entertainment and social criticism, for example a song entitled “Perdamaian” (‘peace’) as popularized by Nasyida Ria group. However, whatever the purpose, a gender arrangement is evident in the *qasidah* lyrics, for example “Jilbab Putih”. This way, religion also becomes an element in Indonesia's gender regime (the way in

which the state and society configures and arranges gender relations). In the name of religion, female identity is constructed by males because males are the holders of religious authority.

PKK
(Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga)

Rumah tangga bahagia keluarga sejahtera
Itu PKK dalam programnya
Membentuk keluarga yang sejahtera
Anak sehat rumah bersih indah lingkungannya
Anak cukup dua saja mudah mendidiknya
Oooo.....semoga Allah meridhoinya

PKK
(Family Welfare Empowerment)

A happy household, a prosperous family
That's the PKK program
To establish a prosperous family
A healthy children, a clean and vigorous neighborhood
Two children is enough, easy to educate them
Oooo.....may Allah give the blessings

In Indonesian thinking, the ideal woman is a reflection of the condition of the family, which is socially constructed as a female domain. Like “*Jilbab Putih*”, “PKK” is still talking about the ideal woman, but it does not problematize the physical appearance of woman and the center attention is not merely the woman as object. The title suggests the relationship between this song and the New Order era’s developmentalism project, in which PKK (The Family Welfare Empowerment) became a central part of the government apparatus, especially in internalizing women’s domestication based on the Marriage Law of Constitution No. 1/1974 article 34. The law explicitly domesticates women by stating that a wife’s obligation is to manage all household matters as well as she can.⁶ In addition, Julia Suryakusuma (1996, 99-101) argues that during the New Order the sexuality of Indonesian women is constructed through *ibuism* ‘motherhood’, not only in the personal framework, but in the framework of the nation state as well, notably through the Dharma Wanita, the national women’s organization established by the Suharto government. Dharma Wanita constructed women’s roles as wives, mothers, or both. These roles were spelt out in the Panca Dharma Wanita, which stated that a wife should support her husband’s career, deliver children, take care of children, be a good wife, and be a

⁶ In fact, historically this notion of ibu-ness was acknowledge by the Boedi Oetomo and Aisyiah’s movement of Muhammadiyah in 1920’s.

protector of society. Thus, women have a responsibility to take care of national morality by maintaining the values established by the gender regime. In addition, the song also emphasizes the social significance of KB (Keluarga Berencana, family planning) which was accorded considerable prominence in the developmentalism of the New Order era. The program proved highly successful in reducing the population boom, but it was also criticized because it relied heavily on coercing women into acceptance of contraception. The gap between the women's experiences and their representation in *qasidah* lyrics raises the question of whose voice is represented even though the singer is a woman.

The singer's role in representing the message embedded in the song is influenced by its gender arrangement. As Sadili, a former trainer in my parents' *qasidah* group, mentioned, there is unwritten song distinction based on gender. "It is not appropriate for a song praising a pious woman to be sung by a woman. It should be sung by a man," said Sadili. This suggests that the construction of gender roles for women is determined by men. By contrast, there are not many songs sung by women in which the lyrics address male conduct. Most *qasidah* songs which address gender relationships focus on a woman's grievances because of her relationship with a man. In addition, a female singer usually cannot determine her own song because it was chosen by the group leadership, which is dominated by men. However, one could also argue that the distinction of song-based gender enable *qasidah* to act as a medium of communication and negotiation between genders. The problem is whether women have the bargaining power to present a female perspective in *qasidah* songs.

Together with an increased female role in the Lasqi managerial board, changes in female representation can be examined by looking closely at a song entitled "Halimah", written by Euis

Sri Mulyani, a recent General Secretary of the Lasqi National committee who is also an officer of the Ministry of Religious Affairs:

Halimah

Oh Halimah oh Halimah
Gadis manis mojang desa
Ramah bertutur kata
Taat pula beribadah
Dia pandai mengaji
Pandai pula menyanyi
Cantik dan berprestasi, namun tetap rendah hati

Bercita-cita tinggi
Jadi ilmuwan sejati
Kini Halimah tinggalkan kampong halaman
Menuntut ilmu di ibukota
Demi masa depan mengejar cita-citanya
Membangun desa kelahirannya
Semoga Allah mengabulkan harapannya.

Halimah

Oh Halimah oh Halimah
A sweet village girl
Friendly in manner
Piously worshiping God
Also excellent in reciting Al quran
And good in singing
Beautiful, high achiever, but also humble

Has high aspirations
Of becoming a real intellectual
Now Halimah has left her hometown
To study in capital city
For a brighter future to achieve her dream
And develop her hometown
May Allah fulfill her wish

The song includes a common stereotype of a woman embedded in the idea of an idealized female image. On the one hand, an ideal woman should be good looking and be a good performer in singing and Qur'an recitation. She should also be sweet and pure as reflected in idiom *gadis manis mojang desa*, that can interpreted as referring to an innocent girl. On the other hand, the song also challenges the value placed on domesticity which is commonly identified as characteristic of the ideal Muslim woman. It suggests that a woman should look beyond herself and her family. Women should have the courage to set up high expectation for themselves for society's sake, a goal in keeping with a tradition of female agency in Southeast Asia. Self transformation entails bridging the gap between modernity and conservative values, and between city and village. In addition, the capital city (i.e. Jakarta) is still considered to be the land of opportunity, an indication of the perception of social gap between urban and rural, which is itself the result of lack of local development. Briefly, here *hijrah* means a transformation of traditional

into modern female profile. Besides lyrical exertion, the image of modernity is highlighted by glamour performance. As Susan Brenner showed that "the women themselves decide to change their clothes as a process of self-awareness and self reconstruction. New way of dressing that caused them to change their attitude" (Nordholt, 2005, 47). Here Jean Gelman Taylor added that of course "Personality can not be measured with the clothes, but how to dress someone would reflect one's personality. Through clothing, makeup, and behavior in each period implies a very strong statement about class, status, and gender. The changes in body appearance offers clues widespread social transformation" (Nordholt, 2005, 121). In this spirit, women of Lasqi knew well what it meant in changing their outfits performances.

In one occasion that I attended in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam⁷, Ibu Euis commended the glamour performance of female groups, fashionable and glorious. Their attractive performance had been a reason the group chosen as cultural ambassador to perform *qasidah* abroad. By emphasizing the international scale of Indonesian *qasidah* with their prestige performance, Euis implies that *qasidah* is not music for low class or *musik rendahan*. In a broader context, it can be interpreted as an attempt to develop an image of modern Muslim. Contrasting image of backwardness of Muslimah, Euis underlined that modern Muslimah is also able to achieve.



⁷ Aceh, 9 Agustus 2009, on the occasion of preparing Lasqi Aceh to go to perform in Batam and Malaysia, in the end occasion of joint celebrations of Agricultural Day in August 2009 and the campaign of International Anti-narcotics, alcohol, psychotropic drugs in Banda Aceh. In addition, outfits performance is one of the judges criteria's in Lasqi competition. See Latifah, 2010.

Lasqi - a Cauldron for Woman Leadership



Ibu Euis Sri Mulyani

Beyond the lyrical and performance value, Ibu Euis has presented herself as a modern Muslimah image through her persona. In her speech and biography (2003, 113-117), she displayed her profile as a success female, both in family (as wife and mother) and (public) career. Her figure as an active woman was shown by her story about her hectic days, high frequent traveling, particularly to organize branches of Lasqi around Indonesia. This way, she also highlights her profile as a leader through long experiences. As she wrote in her book, she exposed her experiences as an activist since she was a student. She informed her track in many organizations. Interest in organization has been a significant driving force for woman to be a member of a *qasidah* group, regardless a desire to be a modern woman. As said by one of respondent, joining a *qasidah* group will expand her social network.⁸ This way, she believes that she will get more opportunity to achieve honor, either worldly or heavenly. Many opportunities she got to perform in other islands, even countries, had been a prove for her that her membership can be a social capital. In a way, by presenting her personality as a modern Muslimah, Ibu Euis has motivated to all Muslimah (i.e. Lasqi members) to be active in *qasidah*. Since, there is conviction in many of the member that by involving in Lasqi they can control their conducts and at the same time practicing dakwah.

"Saya dapat menjaga sikap dan dapat mengamalkan dari hadist "Sampaikan Ilmu walau hanya satu Ayat"⁹

⁸ Interviewed with one of qasidah members in Aceh, 9 agustus 2009.

⁹ Respond from SF - Lasqi Jakarta. 29 December 2010.

Indeed, most of the leader of *qasidah* group is a woman, however as one of the prominent board as well as trainer from Lasqi South Kalimantan told, political consideration that significant leader or organizer is (should be) a public figure (the wife of distinguished bureaucrat) and with an appropriate knowledge of *qasidah* is encouraged.¹⁰ On one hand, it can be a positive factor since they will have a great influence and power to people and resources. On the other hand, it can be unconstructive if the leader only by name and does not pro-active managing group. Therefore it is not surprising enough that the leader or organizer is the wife of public figure, particularly the wife of recognized government official.

It is worth to note here that the contrast between man and woman leadership in Lasqi is that woman becomes Lasqi administrator usually given and un-rooted because she already has certain bureaucratic position or achieved from her husband status, such as a local Lasqi administrator in Bogor who is also the head of BKMT Bogor. While man leadership is much more rooted and dynamics, it develops from the ground driven by his interest, passion, and skill either on the managerial things or its *qasidah* techniques. Henceforth, typically, it was ordinary male who becomes the administrator, as contrast to the woman. It is because as a ‘public’ figure, however, the woman leadership in Lasqi is seen as hefty. She is obeyed and respected; also she has vast access to the resources for the development of the organization. Nevertheless, in the other side, her hierarchical leadership could hamper the creativity forces of her “subordinates” hence the organization may not develop well because they are lacking to take initiatives and more on waiting instructions.¹¹

Besides presenting role model as a modern Muslimah, female leadership primarily is driven form the enormous interest and talent of music supported by the spirit of dakwah. As

¹⁰ Respond from Mj – Lasqi of South Kalimantan. 29 December 2010.

¹¹ Interviewed with Lasqi informant, 22 December 2010.

suggested by Euis Mulyani (2003, xiii), art is not merely cultural product, but also grateful expression to the Creator. In her view, art in Islam should function as a media to expand the love to God, not just as an entertainment. Therefore, Islamic art should take a side with virtue, rightness, and aesthetic feeling. This motivation has driven Euis to write at least 400 popular Islamic songs and qasidah since 1985. She also wrote *Mari Berdendang*, a religious song book for children (2003, 115). In addition, in 1978-2001, she was elected as head of several activities and groups of any associated Islamic art and culture. Recently besides as general secretary of Lasqi National, she is also active as a head of jury board of festival qasidah, shalawat, nasyid, and marawis. The similar role also performed by Nur Asiah Djamil, a leader of Nada Sahara, *qasidah* group in Medan. As noted by Rasmussen (2010, 190; 192), Nur Aisyah Jamil has been considered as a pioneer of the all-woman group and modern *qasidah*, by combining Arabic element of language and musical aesthetics and local elements, such as music melayu and dangdut. Besides playing flute (*suling*) very well, she is a well known for her singing and composition.

Like most *qasidah* performer, many of its prominent figures in Lasqi were grown up or at least attached to Al Quran recitation school, pesantren, or Majelis Taklim.¹² It is worth to add note here that in fact it is through Majelis Taklim, Lasqi nurtures and spread its vision and mission in the middle and lower class of Muslim milieu. Many of Majelis Taklim's members are adult women (*Ibu-Ibu*) that want to study ilmu agama (religious science).¹³ It is a one flow communication or monologue in its manner. Many of the grass roots Lasqi members are from these majelis taklim. But the 'elite' majelis taklim has its own different form such as Pengajian

¹² Also known as pengajian or Taman Pendidikan AlQuran, TPA. The majelis taklim is directly under the supervisor of Religious Affair Department. see Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam (2009).

¹³ It does not mean anyway that there is no male majelis taklim, indeed there are many male majelis taklim but then it is not uncommon that there are always many females who are also attending.

Ekklusif, Klub Pengajian Agama, and etcetera that using dialog in its manner. Both in elite and non-elite majelis taklim they had a common material and content thus are -after a short listening (and discussing) religious matter by the kyai/ustad- are reading *Yaasin*, *Tahlil* and then continue with reading *ratib* and *mauled nabi* and then close the session with doa. It is in the session of *mauled nabi* qasidah rebana of lasqi is being introduced. Indeed, the main reason of introducing the qasidah rebana is lessening the monotonous happening of majelis taklim. Nevertheless, thence it is often that the rebana qasidah session became the initial reason for having majelis taklim.¹⁴ In this case it is intended, initially, to draw and attract the teenagers to have religious understanding (in many cases the ustad/kiai is always male).¹⁵ Particularly when they realized that through the qasidah performance in front of public - and the competitions- they can express their female voices (loudly) and (modest) appearances more than as the reciter Quran at the MTQ festival.

Finally, talking about Lasqi and the role of women in its leadership in Islamic musical arts we cannot neglected the development of women position in the Nasyid ‘movement’. For both of them the status of women aesthetical appearance and voices in the public is still debatable in muslim society, but as what Rasmussen optimistically argued and predicted Nasyid has evolved to the same direction of particularly Qasidah rebana of Lasqi.¹⁶ In which, female voices is also gradually recognized and accepted in public realm. In 7 Agustus 2010, there was Grand Final

¹⁴ Respond from SF- the counseling manager (psychologist) for member and non member of Lasqi Jakarta- 29 December 2010.

¹⁵ Respond from SF - Lasqi Jakarta. 29 December 2010.

¹⁶ It is still informal information by one of the Lasqi boards, that the changing Lasqi to Laski (Lembaga Seni Kesenian Islam) is part of the effort by Lasqi to include nasyid under the umbrella of Lasqi, but apparently Nasyid reluctant to affiliate themselves with Lasqi and they build their own umbrella: the Association of Nusantara Nasyid –ANN in 2006. In which PKS politician who has a power in government also supported -in the name of his department- as the event of “FESTIVAL NASYID PEMUDA INDONESIA (FNPI) 2009 where fixed prize from Menegpora (Sport and Youth Ministry)RI was competed.

Festival Nasyid Muslimah 2010, being held at PPSDMS Depok West Jawa in which new generations of Bestari as female nasyid groups are competing one another in front of public (although most of the audience is the fans and supporters of nasyid)¹⁷. Nevertheless, as in Qasidah rebana, their voices and appearance are still under the surveillance of male voices as marked in The Fikr's song¹⁸:

Wanita Sholihat

by The Fikr (Album: Cinta)

Perhiasan yang paling indah
bagi seorang abdi Allah
Itulah ia wanita sholehah
Ia menghiasi dunia

Perhiasan yang paling indah
bagi seorang abdi Allah
Itulah ia wanita sholehah
Ia menghiasi dunia
Itulah ia wanita sholehah
Ia menghiasi dunia

Aurat ditutup demi kehormatan
Kitab Al Qur'an didaulahkan
Suami mereka ditaatinya
Walau berjualan di rumah saja

Karena iman dan juga Islam
Telah menjadi keyakinan
Jiwa raga mampu di korbakan
Harta kemewahan dileburkan

Di dalam kehidupan ini
dia menampakkan kemuliaan
Bagai sekutum mawar yang tegar
Ditengah gelombang kehidupan

Aurat ditutup demi kehormatan
Kitab al Qur'an didaulahkan
Suami mereka ditaatinya
Akhlak mulia yang ia hadirkan

Pious Women

by The Fikr (Album: Love)

The most beautiful jewelry
for a servant of God
That she is a pious woman
She decorated the world

The most beautiful jewelry
for a servant of God
That she is a pious woman
She decorated the world
That she is a pious woman
She decorated the world

Aurat is closed for the sake of honor
Qur'an is sovereign upon
Compliance with their husbands
Though selling at home

Because Islam and faith
Has become a belief
Able in sacrificing body and soul
Luxury property are smelted

In this life
she appears her glory
Just like the stiff of roses
Amid the waves of life

Aurat is closed for the sake of honor
Qur'an is sovereign upon
Compliance with their husbands
Noble character she presents

¹⁷ Now in nasyid they also use modern and 'traditional' instruments, not merely in a capella/*akapela* style anymore.

¹⁸ In PKS sympathizers' the debates on female nasyid was still in questioning as shown by the initial present of Bestari group founded by Asma Nadia and friends. It seems polarization of position in this matter is inevitably present in muslim community.

Karena iman dan juga Islam
Telah menjadi keyakinan
Jiwa raga mampu di korbankan
Harta kemewahan dileburkan

Because Islam and faith
Has become a belief
Able in sacrificing body and soul
Luxury property are smelted

Di dalam kehidupan ini
dia menampakkan kemuliaan
Bagai sekuntum mawar yang tegar
Ditengah gelombang kehidupan

In this life
she appears her glory
Just like the stiff of roses
Amid the waves of life

Wanita sholehah....

Women sholehah

Conclusion: Muslimah and the Islamising of Indonesia

The dominance of creative imagination of Arabic element in *qasidah*, is stated in definition *qasidah* given by Lasqi which is “Islamic song with Middle East melody” (Mulyani, 2003, 84), and which its supported institutions “... serves as a model for the construction of Islamic community and the production of Arabic-based Islamic performance” (Rasmussen, 2010: 54). And although the “Indonesia imagines the Middle East artistically not through exploitation and objectification, as Said and his followers would argue has been the case with the West, but more through musical homage and blatant mimesis (Rasmussen, 2010: 198).” Indeed, this is a continuum process of redefining Indonesian Islam. Thus, if the *qasidah* imagining Islam for Indonesia as in the aesthetical aura of exotic Middle Eastern, the *nasyid* imagination goes further to the roots that “neither in Indonesia nor in the Arab world. Instead, it embraces the accoutrements of modernity, science, technology, wealth, and even the English language (Rasmussen, 2010, 205).” Thus, apparently, in the midst of this two pole of streams, modern modesty and Arabic traditions, Indonesian Muslimah are in struggling to define their Islam. In which in a certain degree the traditional and local expression is still being questioned. Thus, if in *qasidah* the traditional and local expression is accepted as the variation of aesthetical taste of

music and performance within the core of ‘local Arabic roots’, in Nasyid they took further step that totally rejected the expression of any local roots and even the Arabic. Instead they took the western roots that unsurprisingly to counter the West (Rasmussen, 2010, 207). For the supporter of Nasyid, nasyid is regarded as the appropriate solution for art and cultural expression that support for the demand of umma religiosity that is respected locally, regionally, and internationally as the new forces of dakwah.¹⁹

It could be said that Lasqi has been very success in creating Indonesian Islam due to the support from their state apparatus connection, in which women are highly recognized for its significant roles. While, Nasyid with their ANN or Association of Nusantara Nasyid, now still in the making of their connection with state apparatus, build their network in more modern - in terms of the management, style of performances, and others – and positively conscious as market based activities.²⁰



Nevertheless, we could see that in this process the role of women of qasidah rebana and nasyid is very significant both as agent of changes but also the ‘victim’ of their sincere passion for dakwah, which is heavily laden with the patriarchal values. Therefore, in respond to this situation, some women muslim also try to counter this issue. In this context, it is worth noting that there are also creative responses to *qasidah* (and nasyid) songs. As mentioned above, the female perspective remains problematic. Responding to this issue, Rahima, of the Center of Education and Information on Islam and Women’s Rights, promoted a

¹⁹ See short profile of ANN at www.ann.or.id

²⁰ Unlike Lasqi that is reluctant with the matter of market, as they seen that music is dakwah and the fact that activities as highly supported by the government (Rasmussen, 2010:189), Nasyid has built more modern management to support their activities by establishing CV.Mitra Kreasi Gemilang.

movement called Sholawat Kesetaraan (Equality Sholawat) in Java.²¹ Thus, it is in this social, political, and cultural imagination, Indonesian muslimah politically active in determining their future expression of Islam

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²¹ Swara Rahima. 2010. "Term of Reference Launching CD Shalawat and Public Discussion Menyemai Kesetaraan Melalui Media Shalawat."

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