

Performing Qasidah, Transforming Nation
The Institutionalization of Islamic Music, its Dynamic Development,
and the Implications for Gender in Indonesia

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine the gender implication of Islamic arts (*qasidah*) in Indonesia that developed in the 1970s as a movement supporting Islamic music, and benefited from a kind of patron-client relationship with the New Order (1965-98). Its goal was (and to some extent, still is) to present government 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.

In considering *qasidah*'s history and development, this research attempts to answer the following questions: How does the gender content of *qasidah* relate to Islamic attitudes towards the performing arts? How are women represented in *qasidah* performance? How does the audience respond to gender relations as revealed in *qasidah*, both in performance and the lyrical texts? The material is drawn primarily from Java and Aceh, and is based on field research, visual recordings and interviews with several figures who have long been involved in *qasidah* as leaders, trainers, or performers.

Introduction

As Wallach (2008, p.4) emphasized, popular culture, particularly popular music, can be a significant arena of cultural struggle. An enormous amount of inequity in social structure, such as that relating to class and gender, can therefore be traced in studies of popular music. Wallach (2008, p. 5) cites Richard Middleton, who argues that the social structure is implanted in music because the genre of music itself consists of “the regulation of vocabulary, types of syntactic

unit, formal organization, characteristic themes, modes of address (who speaks to whom and after what fashion), and structures of feeling”. If we see popular culture – music, art, film etc -- as the expression of the attitudes and experience of ordinary people, then Huntington (1996, p. 91) argues that it can provide an informal perspective on the world. He further suggests that structures of power can be revealed in music as a cultural form since “culture almost always follows power”. In other words, music exposes social constructions embedded in cultural practices, including social structure. Certainly, it is a fallacy of deterministic Marxism to consider that a structure of relations will automatically determine people’s actions; as Connell (2007, 55) emphasized, any structure of relations definitely characterizes “possibilities and consequences”. As a result, popular culture has been an arena of contestation of forces in forming local identities, including gender identity.

In regard to Elizabeth Wilson’s argument (1987), as quoted by Connell (2007, p. 66), popular culture is a site of gender arrangement through the use of gender symbolism. It constructs what are considered appropriate and inappropriate behaviors according to the priorities of the gender regime, including those shaped by religion. This is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where music is seen as an appropriate way of teaching and promoting the values and expectations for the *ummat*, the Muslim community. In this context, religious music performances represent the interconnection of religion, arts, and gender although there are different levels of bonding among them.

Deeper relationships among gender and performing arts are seen in *qasidah* because of Islamic views on arts and gender; for example a *hadith* transmitted by the 10th century scholar Ath Thabari states that it is not permissible to teach women to sing (Omar 1964, p. 13). On the other hand, another *hadith* allows singing and dancing, under certain circumstances, not only

exclusively among male or female, but also among female and male (Omar 1960, p. 30). This research attempts to answer the following questions: How does the gender content of *qasidah* relate to Islamic attitudes towards the performing arts? How are women represented in *qasidah* performance? How does the audience respond to gender relations as revealed in *qasidah*, both in performance and the lyrical texts? This study has a significant meaning in Southeast Asian studies for three reasons. First, considering Indonesia's status as a predominantly Muslim country, the study of Indonesian Islamic popular culture will encourage an awareness of the divergence of Islam throughout the world and counter a single, Middle-East centered image of Islam. Second, assessment of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia is needed to obtain a deeper perspective about religious resurgence which has been a global phenomenon since the 1970s. 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 study 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. Third, by looking closely at the dynamic of individual and community involved in religious movements through Islamic popular culture and its set of connections with national politics, this research will contribute significantly to the development of a history of Southeast Asia by encouraging comparisons about the relationship between religious music, state goals and social change.

Scope and Methods

It is difficult to provide a single definition of *qasidah* since every area in Indonesia has its own variation. However, Bambang Hambali, the current chief of Lasqi (Lembaga Seni *Qasidah* Indonesia) DKI Jaya (the Greater Jakarta Special Capital region) branch provides an explanation

about the origin of *qasidah*, which he views as a type of *rebana* performance rooted in Betawi (a sub-culture specifically associated with Jakarta) culture. Based on his information, *qasidah* is a subordinate of *rebana* types. Actually, *rebana* refers to a percussion instrument, a single headed drum with a drumhead made of goat hide (*membranophon*). There is also a *rebana* with metal discs called a tambourine. Usually there are different sizes of *rebana* in a group (from the smallest to the largest --*rebana ketimpring*, *rebana hadroh*, *rebana maukhid*, *rebana burdah*, and *rebana biang*) which thus create a combination of sounds when they are hit one after another. Sometimes the differentiation of *rebana* shapes can be related to the content and function of performance, for example *rebana ketimpring* or *kerincingan* which is composed of three side of metal discs and drumhead with diameter 20-30 cm. *Rebana ketimpring* is called *rebana ngarak* when performed in wedding ceremonies to accompany songs taken from special texts known as “diba” or “diwan hadroh”. In addition, it is called *rebana maulid* when used to accompany songs about Prophet Muhammad’s life history taken from the text “Syaraful Anam”(The Birth of the Pride of All Creatures)



A set of *Rebana*

Moreover, *rebana* differentiation also implies various styles of performance, which are sometimes related to gender, for example the larger *rebana* are usually played by men. *Qasidah*

has developed from *Rebana Dor* and it has become the most popular form of *rebana* because of the attractiveness and dynamism of its performance. Unlike other kinds of *rebana* that are played only by males, it is also played by females, which one respondent noted is considered more appealing to audiences. Female *qasidah* performances can also be considered more interesting since the small and medium size of *rebana* women use enable them to move more freely in a particular configuration.



Bass *rebana hadrah* played by men who sit cross –legged, considered appropriate for males

However, *qasidah* singing is not merely accompanied by *rebana*. In modern types of *qasidah*, it is also accompanied by some other instruments such as guitars, violins, and keyboards even though it is *ikhtilaf* (there is no agreement about the issue among Islamic scholars). This paper will therefore include both types of *qasidah*, the modern and traditional. Although *rebana*, which is also called *terbang*, is used in Seni Shalawatan Katolik, Catholic Praising Performing Arts, in Yogyakarta, the Catholic use of *Rebana* will be excluded from this discussion.¹

¹ There is no difference between the instruments in Muslim and Catholic praise songs, but the difference lies in the lyrics, for instance, the Catholics would praise Jesus and Mary, and the rhythm is slower and softer.

The qualitative research was conducted by gathering data, both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected by interviewing several figures who were involved in *qasidah* for years as a leader, trainer, or player. Besides field research, interviews were primarily carried out by long distance telephone calls. In addition, performance data was taken from recordings of performances displayed in Youtube.com (ethnography approach of internet) and documents of Lasqi (Lembaga Seni *Qasidah* Indonesia).² The secondary data was gathered by collecting *qasidah* representations in books and mass media. Finally, the research was shaped by feminist content analysis, in which I examine cultural texts: lyrics and performances of *qasidah*, as a cultural artifact (Reinharz, 1992, p. 144-163).

My positionality is also important in this study, since I was a *qasidah* player in secondary school, but not a professional performer. Another important personal experience which influences my reflection on *qasidah* is my family's close connection with *qasidah* since my mother was a leader of the Nurul Makmur *qasidah* group and my father was a leader of the regional organization of *qasidah*, Lasqi Depok Branch, for about two decades, 1980-2000s.

The discussion will be developed by looking at three layers of *qasidah* as a performing art. The first is the narrative level, which consists of an analytical view of gender issues based on the lyrics of *qasidah* songs. The second is the act of performance and performance protocol, including the regulation of onstage behavior and performance, according to *syariah*. In addition, the persona of the performer will be discussed. The last is the response of audiences as seen in their commentaries on *qasidah* performances in Youtube.com and interviews. In addition, the evaluation of audience responses is conducted by linking it to other cultural texts, inter-textually,

<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2008/12/25/00473021>

² Lasqi was established in the 1970s by DR. H. Tutty Alawiyah AS, who had helped popularize *qasidah* since 1963 via women's religious meetings, and subsequently radio and television. From 1972 during the New Order, Lasqi worked together with Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran (MTQ), the state organization for sponsoring the recitation of the Qur'an. <http://www.tokohindonesia.com/ensiklopedi/t/tutty-alawiyah/index.shtml>

both in terms of continuities and changes.

The History of *Qasidah*

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. Prabasmoro argued that popular culture, as part of a 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.

The history of Islamic music can be traced back by reference to Al Farabi's (950 CE) theory in *al-Musiqa al-Kabir*, as mentioned by Poetra (2004, 49-50). Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (622 CE), Islam has been enriched by many songs praising God and his messenger (Rasul). One of oldest *nasyid* is "Shalawat Badar," which was performed by the Anshar (i.e. the helpers or converts from Medina) group in company with a *rebana* ensemble to welcome Muhammad and his companions to Medina at the time of the *hijra* (emigration from Mecca to Medina). Farabi categorized the Arabic religious and spiritually praising song as *nasyid* (Poetra 2004, p. 49). Furthermore, Barendregt (2006, 10) explains the root of *nasyid* as the Arabic word *annasyi*, which means "(singer of) a religious song". However, along with its development in Arabic society, *nasyid* functions have been extended to include songs for various events, such as harvesting or war, not only the praise of God.

As Islam spread in Indonesia, praise songs started to appear in 13th CE through contacts with the Middle East (Putra 2004, p. 51) As it was acculturated, Islamic music had a great role in

the Islamic mission, for example, the legendary Walis of Java -- Sunan Giri, Sunan Ampel, and Sunan Bonang -- used gamelan and local symbols in their missionizing (Spiller 2004, p. 58). In the era of sovereign kingdoms, the court became the center of Islamic music, but in the years after the proclamation of independence in 1945, the center of Islamic music moved from the mosque and *pesantren* to urban sites. The nature of this transmission is debatable, but it has been argued that in the modern era of Indonesian independence and especially after the alleged communist coup of 1965 people were hungry for religious teaching, which the state used as a buffer against 'evil' communism. Religious education, supported by the state, along with religious arts, was also encouraged both inside and outside the state's bureaucratic and educational institutions. Indeed, religious education has long been a part of Indonesian culture and consciousness, since religion is embedded in Indonesian's culture and in the movement for independence (Mujibburahman, 2006). Nonetheless, it was actually under the New Order regime (1965-98) that *qasidah* was introduced as Indonesian Islamic art to the whole bureaucracy and was initiated and nurtured in the state's educational institutions.

Islamic music functions as a means of proselytism or mission (*dakwah*) in increasing people's faith through entertainment. Moreover, it also has a purpose of strengthening the spirit to fight the 'enemy,' as indicated by *shalawat Badar*. After Indonesia attained independence (1950s), Islamic music functioned as an expression of gratitude by people to God for the blessing of freedom. In this period, we see the spread of *gambus*, which used percussions-particularly *rebana*- as well as stringed, wind instrument, violin, and accordion.. The center was no longer merely the mosque, but also schools and houses. Islamic music still continued to grow in the New Order Era (1965-1998). Based on Poetra, this relates to the difficult economy and social situation. Some prominent figures in that period are Rafiqoh Darto Wahab, Nanang Qosim,

Juariah, and orkes gambus El-Fata, who became well-known through television, radio and the distribution of cheap cassettes. Simultaneously, however, the more westernized and modern environment of urban areas seems to have contributed at least indirectly to a decline of Islamic music. By contrast, Islamic music continued to flourish in the countryside where the people were marginalized by development programs. Thus, Islamic music, particularly *qasidah*, has been identified as low class music, similar to the case of *dangdut*. Prominent Indonesian music groups such as Bimbo which was well known for its popular music, were looked down on when they began to perform *qasidah* (Sumarsono 1998, p. 21).

Bimbo was already identified as a phenomenon of social transformation in Indonesian Islamic society.³ As quoted by Sumarsono, Fachry Ali commented on the social mobility of Indonesian Islamic society in that period. Islamic society, rooted in the village, tried to cross the line by establishing an urban orientation through changing instruments, choice of music, and overall presentation . With this social transformation, Bimbo progressed by performing an urban sense of music (pop) with rural musical style. Bimbo became an identity symbol of the social integration of *santri* (religious class of society), whose roots are in the village, as they moved into urban settings. Salam and Budi (2005) observed that the hierarchy concept in art between modern (city) and traditional (village) was eliminated in the early 2000s since *dangdut* and *nasyid* (popularized by Malaysian Islamic accapela groups) successfully penetrated the city market. Barendregt (2006) argues that the success of *nasyid* as a new style of Islamic popular culture was partly because they imitate western appearance, particular the style of boy-band music which emphasize the visual outlook and its “fandom,”⁴ the building of fans through

³ Originally Bimbo was not a *qasidah* group, but it developed in this direction following Islamic resurgence in Bandung in the 1970s and was particularly popular among youth (Rosyad 1995).

⁴ Fandom (from the noun *fan* and the affix *-dom*, as in *kingdom*, *freedom*, etc.) is a term used to refer to a subculture composed of fans characterized by a feeling of sympathy and camaraderie with others who share a common interest.

popular competitions in the mode of “American Idol”.



Urban Image of Bimbo’s cover 80s to 2000s

However, the “westernized” Islamic popular culture of *nasyid* does not mean the loss of Islamic norms regarding performance. As Barendregt observed, female groups are still a minority in the growth of *nasyid*, in contrast to *qasidah* since the tradition of *nasyid* has tended to regard the female voice as *aurat* (part of body that is forbidden to expose to people outside of the family because it is assumed it can encourage sexual desire).

Research by Browne (2000) and Weintraub (2010) analyses 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, p. 10) analyses the phenomenon of Inul Daratista, a villager who gained the spotlight in a relatively short time and triggered considerable controversy because of her “sensational” performances, as an expression of political contestation of pop culture. This issue is linked to the concept of social

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fandom> (Accessed at April 14, 2010)

embodiment as Connell (2007, p. 47) mentioned that the body can simultaneously be regarded as a “canvas”, an object and agent of social practice.

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. Even though *gambus* lyrics often include Arabic, they do not mainly function as a medium for worshipping God because of the secular content of the songs. Berg’s distinction between *qasidah* and *gambus* also highlighted the main character of *qasidah* as “musik dakwah Islami.” Berg formulates the relationship of music and *dakwah* as follows:

Dakwah is the act of teaching about Islam and it is a powerful and legitimizing word in Islamic communities as performing *dakwah* is considered to be an act of worship to God. The text and religious message, or *dakwah*, are what make these musical styles powerful and important in popular music expression in Indonesian as well as make these musical styles important players in the commercial Indonesian music industry (Berg 2007, p. 526).

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, p. 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 the piano, which is identified as a non-Islamic instrument by some Muslim leaders, who reject such use. However, many 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, had previously used those modern instruments. More importantly, Bimbo's effort to create an urban image of *qasidah* can be related to the spirit of Islamic resurgence among urban dwellers in the 1980s as Huntington pointed out (1996, p./ 101): “ ... the religious revival is an urban phenomenon and appeals to people who are modern-oriented, well-educated, and pursue careers in the professions, government, and commerce.”

Rahmat (2005, p. 82) describes various expressions of Islamic resurgence: implementing Islamic law, replacing western law products, Arabic language and symbolic usage, the broadening of Islamic education, practicing Islamic teaching related to social behavior, the emergence of 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 regulations for performing, particularly for females. Moreover, in the spirit of Islamic resurgence, in the New Order Era, religion and state collaborated to emphasize a patriarchal perspective on gender and sexuality, such as reinforcing female domesticity (Heryanto, 2008, p. 39; Robinson, 2009, p. 68). Despite this fact, as Effendy (2008, p. 24) argued, the relation between *fatwa* (policy made by religious authority) and female performers is not uncontested. Female performers actively built strategies as negotiation efforts in a manner familiar to those who study the politics of marginality.

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. As noted by Zulkarnain (2004, p. xviii), 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. Thus, Zulkarnain believes that this is the beginning of *nasyid* Indonesia. Another significant phenomenon of female roles in *qasidah* is Nasyida Ria, a popular *qasidah* modern group consists of nine women from Semarang, Central Java. The group, which was established in 1975, is well known for its social critique as well as its Islamic teaching content, particularly in its album entitled *Keadilan* (justice), launched in 1994. Moreover, 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.

Institutionalized *Qasidah*

Even though *qasidah* has been identified as rural music, particularly associated with village-based *santri* (student of pesantren) because of its social function the development of *qasidah* is now centered on urban culture. Information received from Bambang Hambali 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. 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’s position as a cultural center was strengthened when the Lasqi management and regulation function spread to other areas, such as West Java, Central Java, Sumatera, and Kalimantan. 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) with Husein Hanafi as the first leader. The process of guiding and controlling

qasidah was conducted by regular national and regional practitioner training and leader meetings. 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. The *qasidah* festival was first held in the Istiqlal mosque, Jakarta, in 1969, two years after *qasidah* groups in Jakarta had been recognized. Since 1995, the national festival is held in a different province every year. Despite this national oversight, Umar Said, a national judge and trainer, claimed that the creativity based on local characteristics will not be limited as long as it is in line with Lasqi standards. Besides regulation of artistic standards, the national committee also decided which 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. Like other art forms such as *wayang* and theater, *qasidah* has been regarded as a potential tool in nation building. This is in tune with the national agenda of Lasqi, as seen in the Lasqi mission, which is “to increase the archipelago vision (*wawasan nusantara*) or nationalistic viewpoint”. This goal was reiterated by the Lasqi leader in 2003 during the tenth national *qasidah* festival in Kalimantan. At the Kalimantan festival Amien Rais, the parliamentary leader, shifted the focus slightly to the local level. He publicly said that the country must protect the national culture as well as local languages, as mentioned in the amendments to the National Constitution made during his tenure. By developing *qasidah*, he said, ordinary people could participate in state development projects in ways appropriate to their ability. This continuing support to Lasqi shows the government’s cultural politics. Indeed, the government role in popularizing Islam had been carried out long

before the establishment of ICMI (Indonesian association of Islamic intellectuals) to gain Muslim support.

The symbiotic relationship between government and Lasqi was a result of the Jakarta board's approach to government over a long process, through public hearings so that their existence was recognized and supported. They also actively built a close relationship with government institutions, particularly cultural, religious, and educational agencies. The result was the official recognition of Lasqi by SK No. 562 March 11, 1985 by Suprpto, Jakarta Governor. Up to now, thirty provinces have joined Lasqi, including those provinces where Islam is minority, such as Maluku. Umar Said observed that since the autonomy era, local government support has greatly increased in comparison with support from the Jakarta government. Personally, as a national trainer who travels a lot from one area to other area around Indonesia, he enjoys local government services that finance his travelling and training. In addition, a big budget, like that for the national festival held in Maluku in 2008, has become a major means of implementing of local government support to Lasqi even though the governor and majority of people are not Muslim. In return, combined with the quality of its *qasidah* performance, a Maluku cultural group was selected to represent Indonesia in an international art festival in Turkey in 2009.

Aceh's experience related to Lasqi shows that in the period of greater autonomy after 1998, which has a special meaning after Aceh became known as Nanggro Aceh Darussalam (NAD) province, provides another example of a local relationship to the national board. Even though *qasidah* has a long tradition in Aceh since it was a center of international trading routes which enabled the rapid penetration of global influences, particularly from Arabia and India, Aceh only joined Lasqi in 2003. The establishment of the Lasqi Aceh branch was a result of a

meeting of several related government agencies held by Aidi Kamal, a special secretary of NAD Governor, at May 6, 2003. Aidi Kamal believed that the Lasqi branch in Aceh was able to grow rapidly since it already strong base of *qasidah* as people's art in villages. However, on the other hand, in 2009 M. Yahya, leader of the Bintang Kejora group complained that financial support is not always distributed equally, a typical problem that is experienced by other groups in other regions.

Teuku Afibudin, an Acehnese *qasidah* senior trainer, states the more significant influence of Lasqi can be seen in the changing of training method by which performers are grouped in line with the national categories of *qasidah* competition, such as children, teenager, female, and vocalist. In addition, he also accepted basic guidance from the national board and developed it according to local characteristics. As the result, in 2005 the NAD *qasidah* group won the championship at the national festival in Jakarta. The desire of Lasqi Aceh to cooperate with the national Lasqi organization was encouraged by the government, which was anxious to build bridges to post-resistance Aceh. This collaboration was apparent in the joint celebrations of Agricultural Day in August 2009 and the campaign of International Anti-narcotics, alcohol, psychotropic drugs in Banda Aceh. This was a result of cooperation between at least three government agencies, the Lasqi national board and the Lasqi Aceh branch. The double position of the Lasqi manager as a public officer has a great role in making cooperation successful; for example, besides functioning as a secretary of the Lasqi Aceh branch, Aidi Kamal is also a special secretary of the governor of NAD. In addition, the governor's wife is also one of the Lasqi leaders in NAD. Furthermore, the secretary's office, which is two stories high and located in a strategic place, is a fine building, well-equipped with musical instruments and other performing facilities and shows the rapid development of Lasqi Aceh branch. The growing

relationship of the *qasidah* community in NAD and the central board of Lasqi in Jakarta during the autonomy era shows that intuitively the cultural interaction is increasing in line with the loosening of political tension between the Acehnese themselves and the central government. This was particularly evident after the tsunami of December 2004, as the extent the of tragedy fostered the need for greater trust and cooperation

Besides the external influence of Lasqi's national guidance, after the tsunami *qasidah* in Aceh was fostered by a more open society that displayed a growing trend towards collaboration between *qasidah* and modern instruments by mixing groups of female and male performers, previously the target of protest from religious figures. Consequently, young people are more interested in *qasidah* since the performance has become more attractive. In addition, young male performers have become more confident in negotiating the established stereotype of male performers on stage. Nonetheless, gender is still an important issue because it relates to NAD restrictions connected to *syariah* (comprehensive body of Islamic law derived from Al Qur'an and *hadith*). For example, the Islamic religious board (MUI) issued a *fatwa* (opinion on a point of Islamic law or dogma) that prohibits men and women performing together except as backing vocal. This means that even though the mixing of male and female performers on stage is allowed, a space between them must still be maintained and they cannot play the same role, for example as dancers.



The Literal Messages of *Qasidah*

As mentioned before, 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. The mission of *qasidah* is clearly stated in the LASQI march:

MARS LASQI

Lembaga seni *qasidah* Indonesia
Seni budaya Islam
20 September tujuh puluh
lahirlah LASQI jaya

Lestarkanlah seni *qasidah*
Itu program-lembaga,
Lomba seni *qasidah*
Bersyi'ar lah dakwah Islam

Muslimin dan muslimat, mari kita wujudkan
Kesatuan dan persatuan, berazas Pancasila

(Organization of Indonesian *qasidah* arts
Islamic cultural art
September 20, [nineteen] seventy
LASQI was born

Everlasting *qasidah*
This is the organizational program
The festival of *qasidah*
Sublime Islamic missionizing

Muslim men and women, let's create
Unity based on Pancasila)

As mentioned before, *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:

JILBAB PUTIH

Berkibar jilbabmu
Di setiap waktu
Di sepanjang jalan
Kulihat kamu
Gebyar jilbabmu meredam nafsu
Busanamu menyejukkan kalbu

Pesona jilbabmu
Anggun di wajahmu
Sekilas senyummu
Menambah ayu
Karena jilbabmu aku terpaku
Cermin taqwa iman didadamu

Ref :
Jilbab-jilbab putih lambing kesucian
Lembut hati penuh kasih teguh pendirian
Jilbab-jilbab putih bagaikan cahaya
Yang bersinar di tengah malam gelap gulita

Di balik jilbabmu
Ada jiwa taqwa
Di balik senyummu
Tersimpan masa depan cerah

White *Jilbab*

Flutter your *jilbab*
Every time
Everywhere
I saw you
Your fluttering *jilbab* reduces lust
Your clothing softens the heart

The charm of your *jilbab*
Enhances your face
A glimpse of your smile
You become lovelier
Because of your *jilbab*, I am glued
The reflection of the piety and faith in your heart

Refrain:
White *jilbab* the symbol of purity
Soft and tenderness strong in principle
White *jilbab* as alight
Lightened up in the darkness of the night

Beyond your *jilbab*
There is a faithful soul
Beyond your smile
A brighter future is hidden

As Connell (2007, p. 66) implied, language is the most significant source of symbolic gender relations. This song, which was popularized by Nasyida Ria, a female modern *qasidah* group, reflects gender relations where the power discourse operates by setting up the image of an ideal woman from a patriarchal point of view. The lyrics are loaded with images of purity that regard woman as a sexual object who must be controlled, as is evident in the sentence “your fluttering *jilbab* reduces lust”. However, I am not trying to say that a woman wearing *jilbab* is suppressed. The problem here is that the use of *jilbab* as a metaphor for a pure woman is emphasizing the patriarchal construction over female sexuality. In patriarchal society, virginity is exaggerated as a separation between “a good woman” and “bad woman” and fundamentally informs the male understanding of female sexuality (Prabasmoro 2006, p. 318).

Nonetheless, it could also be argued that the text does invoke male desire, although phrased in aesthetic rather than erotic terms. The male gaze is highlighted by the phrases “I saw you,” which accentuates the position of the woman as an object. Although the narrator, in this case the singer, is a woman, it does not mean the song is free from the patriarchal point of view,

or from the obvious stereotypes of women as depicted in the words “softening the heart,” “Elegant in your face, a glimpse of your smile, you become more lovely”, and “soft and tenderness”. In short, “*Jilbab Putih*” demonstrates the tendency to regard the female body as an object of patriarchal value. In addition, since *jilbab* is used to exercise patriarchal value, 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 (Family Welfare Movement)

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

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 Movement) 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. In addition, Julia Suryakusuma (1996, p. 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 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. In a manner similar to "*Jilbab Putih*," this song makes obvious use of religion to legitimize the state's project in regard to control over people. It is seen from the last line "Oooo.....may Allah give the blessing".

Janda

Baru sekarang oh aku rasakan
Tak punyai kasih rasanya kesepian
Tak ada tempat mencurahkan rasa rinduku oh
Serta kasih saying
Barulah satu bulan diriku ditinggalkan
Aku sudah tak tahan izinkan kesepian

Ya Allah, Ya Tuhan hindari godaan setan
Baru sekarang aku rasakan tak punyai kasih rasanya kesepian

Sedangku menyayangi
Sedangku mengasihi
Kekasihku tercinta, kini telah tiada
Ku hanya manusia, tiada berdaya
Dialah yang kuasa, segala-galanya
Mungkinkah diriku dekat dikau
Menjadi janda, semoga kudapat gantinya seperti dia

Widow

Just now I felt
I have no love, feeling lonely
There is no place to express my longing oh
And affection
Just one month ago you left me
I can't stand the loneliness
Ya Allah, Ya God, please protect me satan's seduction

Just now I feel I don't have a love, I am lonely
When I give my compassion
When I give my love
My love is gone now
I am only a human, powerless
He is the most powerful, everything
Is it possible for me to be near you
Being a widow I hope I can find someone like you

Recent research by University of Indonesia Sociologist, Dr Widjanjanti Mulyono Santoso reported in *Jawa Pos* (July 11, 2007), indicates that the widow still carries negative images in Indonesia because the complete family focused on a husband and wife is considered to be a cornerstone of the society. As Zulinarni (2004) points out, the pressure is much greater on a young woman who is considered less able to endure loneliness and is still sexually active. Moreover, a widow from a lower social class will be subject to more social pressure and disapproval than one from the upper class, since public opinion is still reluctant to acknowledge the social fact of women as the heads of families. Besides social class, age also influences the

social response to widows. A young widow will be subject to more pressure and stereotyping than an older one because of the fear that young widows will not be able to control their sexual desire and will take other women's husbands. This stigma is emphasized on the *qasidah* song entitled "Widow" translated above. Rather than empowering women by increasing their internal strength, the song depicts a woman's weakness when facing life alone. The song emphasizes women's weak personality, suggesting that she has a low confidence to maximize her potential as a human being; "I am only a human, powerless". She cannot trust her own ability to give meaning to her life, but always depends on something or someone outside herself to achieve happiness. This view of women's mental weakness reinforces prejudices about women's sexual proclivities and highlights the stigma of woman as seductress, the "Mara evil"⁵. The expression "I can't stand the loneliness Ya Allah, Ya God, please protect me from evil seduction" raises her position as "the Mara evil", the doer of seduction, not the victim. Barendregt (2006) states that there is a contradictory view of female power: women are often seen as fragile and an object of male desire; simultaneously, however, they are also considered to be powerful generators of male desire. The depiction of women's feelings in this song contrasts with the life stories of women as documented in Widjanjanti's study. As in the previous song, 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 an 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

⁵ The story of the attempted seduction of the Buddha by three daughters of Mara, the evil one, also penetrated Muslim literature and is well known in contemporary popular culture in Indonesia.

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 kampung halaman
Menuntut ilmu di ibukota
Tinggalkan kampung 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 be 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 expectations 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.

Performer and Persona

The gap between women's perspectives and the message delivered in *qasidah* songs as described above raises questions about the significance of the narrator, in this case the performer, and the message delivered, particularly because of *qasidah*'s character as religious music and because preaching is its primary purpose. The persona is one of the important elements in the act of preaching, since the persona is part of the message. That is why some prominent Indonesian preachers are abandoned by their followers when their way of life is considered unacceptable by most people, such as the polygamy of the formerly popular preacher Abdullah Gymnasiar (Aa Gym) from Dauruttahid Pesantren. As described by Kathryn Robinson (2009, p. 180), his appeal and high profit business declined drastically after his second marriage in 2006. "Who is talking what," "how to" deliver the message is also a very important consideration in *dakwah*. Moreover, Islam also has strict behavioral guidelines particularly with regard to gender relationships and related symbolism. The interviews I conducted indicate that the representation of gender relationships in *qasidah* is influenced by both cultural understandings and power relations.

The notion of gender symbolism in *qasidah* can be observed from the criteria of *qasidah* festivals. Based on my interview with Sadili and my mother, Nana Laelana, a former judge and leader of *qasidah* groups, there are three main criteria of assessment in *qasidah* festivals: instrumental, vocal, and performance, which include makeup, attire, blocking (the precise movement and positioning of actors on a stage), and variation in movement. Gender arrangement determines the differentiation between female and male performances, for example, as Sadili mentioned, men's groups are more flexibility in performing movement variations. Most of the reasons are related to women's attire, which limits their mobility. Nevertheless, they are also related to acceptable and unacceptable notions of Islamic conduct. For example, even though, a

female group wears trousers, which enable women to move freely, it does not mean they are allowed, to squat as male groups do.

Although female *qasidah* groups have higher status than, for instance, female gamelan groups in Bali, power relationships still influence women's self representation in performance (Bakan 1999, p. 253-256). As in the case of choice of songs, female performers still find it difficult to express themselves because many elements of performance, such as movement, blocking, makeup, and attire are determined by others. The trainer, together with the group leader, has the authority to determine almost all aspects of the performance. Widodo, the leader of Cahaya Putri (Light of Women), explained that he usually arranges everything related to his group's performance and that the group accepts his decision. Unfortunately, most group leaders and trainers are male. Sadili thought this was related to their motivation and the level of participation of individuals involved in *qasidah*. In his view, women usually practice *qasidah* only as a leisure time activity, and their participation is also limited by their domestic duties. They tend to focus only on learning their own part and cannot play other instruments, for example. On the other hand, male performers are normally more enthusiastic about learning other parts beside their own and are keen to develop creativity to enhance their prospects of becoming trainers and reaping financial rewards.

Furthermore, there are many kinds of *qasidah* modern performances. Some groups, like Southul Fata (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsLbcKJGdJI&feature=related>), continue the "old fashioned" style just like Nasyida Ria, a well-established female group of *qasidah modern*. The lead singer's bodily and facial expressions are very limited. The makeup of performers should not be overdone. However, this does not mean that the performance is free from the objectification of females by the male gaze. As seen in "Wajah Ayu" 'Pretty Face'

performed by the group, the message of the song said that all part of woman's body are dedicated to her husband. Delivered in a sweet, gentle, and polite manner, this style is intended to evoke the image of the refined character of the ideal wife.

These performances are quite different from those of groups rooted in the *dangdut* tradition such as Sera (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmJx_gUjTLE&feature=related). Sera is a famous *dangdut* group from East Java. They are known for having a very erotic female singer (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qa391d76oE&feature=related>). Recently, they have also become known for *qasidah* performances, and although this could be interpreted as resistance to conservative Islam their change in style appears to be primarily for commercial reasons. Sera's singers appear to be less constrained in their performances. They move their hips and hands along with the song, and their physical appearances are more eye-catching. The negative stereotype of the widow which is embedded implicitly in "Janda" lyrics – i.e, that a widow is a potential seducer – is highlighted in their performance. Rather than expressing her sorrow and loneliness after the death of her spouse, the singer's bodily movement exhibits female sexual appeal, such as swaying her hips and shoulders and wiggling her behind back and forth. In addition, the long dress the singer wears does not eliminate her erotic movements because it is very tight.

However, limitations in movement, attire, and makeup do not always decrease the degree to which the female performer's body is objectified. The function of the female performer as decoration is obvious in the performance of the Pondok Pesantren Walisongo Rebana Group (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPs1Ux5gMqI&feature=related>). Here female performers do not have significant roles, either as musicians or singers, and seem merely to complement the male vocal lead. In addition, according to the cover information, male domination can be

assumed since the leading vocalist, Ma'ruf Islamudin, is also the leader of the group. Another interesting fact is that he wrote his songs by himself, which is rarely true of female singers.

Based on their observation on spiritual cultural performing in Lamongan, East Java, Chamim, Hidayat, et al (2003, 44-46), point to commercialization tendencies as local arts necessarily adjust to social changes resulting from industrialization. They explain this tendency as a characteristic of religious and cultural performances that are also functioning as entertainment in a commercializing environment. However, they differentiate between local arts: *seni tanggapan* (commercial) and *non-tanggapan* (uncommercial), so that popularity is not necessarily related to commercial success. Besides their religious significance, non-commercial local arts, such as *barzanjen* (a song praising the Prophet Muhammad) have community bases such as the mosque or *pesantran* (Islamic residential school) so the performance also functions as a symbol of social bonds.

Audience Reception

In conjunction with varieties performance styles of *qasidah*, there is a wide range of audience receptions, which are greatly influenced by social class. Thus, any description of the audience reception should take into account the social category of the audience. This can be composed of groups and individuals with differing levels of religious interest and can be either homogenous (such as a group of *santri*) or quite varied. Besides, the focal point of audience reception includes the contestation between modernity and tradition, lyrics, and performance. Every layer of audience reception shows that gender arrangement becomes one of the norms in evaluation, as seen in following Youtube.com commentary [in Javanese]:

Suwarane apik, lagune apik, seni katane pun apik, nging mbok ya ora usah ngetokke wong wedhok jogetan kabeh wong lagune Islami ono video jogetan wong wedok

bokongne megal-megol dadi ora Islami. Walaupun nganggo kerudung brukutan kabeh. Salah kaprah lho mas!

The vocal is good, the song is nice, the lyrics is also fine, but it should not performed by a swaying female singer. The Islamic song which is sung by female who wiggles her behind back and forth is no longer Islamic, even though she covers all her body. It is an established mistake.

The comment above shows that the evaluation of female performers is the main reason some people disapprove of *qasidah*. In other words, female performance is becoming a focus of attention, particularly when it is related to female sexuality. The male gaze is becoming the normative institution which defines what is accepted and not acceptable. Referring to the concept of “vagina dentata”, as elucidated by Prabasmoro (2006:292-3), the female body and its internal desire are regarded as a threatening “monster”. The female body is described as a gate to temptation, infused with sensual enchantment as described in an old Arabic poem cited by K.H. Hussein Muhammad (2008: 21) "*Inna al Nisa Syayathin Khuliqna Lana. Na'udzu Billah min Syarr al Syayathin*. (Women are devils who are created for us. And we must ask for God's protection against these devils).

The female body is thus seen as a potential threat to male existence and to their spiritual life. A Javanese man should be aware of the threatening influence of money, female, and the desire for power. However, in fact the impact of this norm will affect not males but females, who should be controlled. The female is always prejudiced by her sexuality because of the male fear of female seduction. Vagina dentata is the symbol of a male fear towards a female “otherness” which is in fact created by him. Therefore, female sexuality should be controlled to save male existence.

Nor does a positive evaluation of female *qasidah* singers necessarily empower women as

agents. The Palapa *Qasidah* Group which is also well known for its *dangdut* performances, received many positive and negative comments. Most of the commentaries referred to the female singer, “Vivi.... apapun pakaiannya kau tetap terlihat cantik dan sexy....” ‘Vivi... however you dress, you still look beautiful and sexy....” This comment underscores the female performer’s image as an object of male gaze. She is not evaluated for her technical vocal ability or her capability to produce music, but primarily for her sexual appeal.

Female performers as the focus of the audience viewpoint also became evident in an interview with two graduate students from a Javanese *pesantren* background and one female graduate student from Aceh. Some commentators on popular music have claimed that people do not listen closely to the text, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, both Javanese respondents referred to Nasyida Ria as their favorite group because of its performance and the social content in its lyrics, even though its social criticism never directly referenced the government. My respondents looked back with nostalgia, comparing Nasyida Ria favorably to the majority of current *qasidah* groups, even though the latter may appear more sophisticated. In the view of these respondents, Nasyida Ria has a stronger identity because of the characteristics of the lyrics as well as the quality of its performance. In their evaluation, current *qasidah* group stress performance rather than the content of the songs. They remarked that social criticism in lyrical content has decreased, and that *syariah* concerns related to social norms of conduct dominated the songs. Another difference that they observed is that clothing has changed to become more “Islamic”, in the past, *kebaya*⁶ was common attire for female performers as seen in the illustration below. Overall, the three respondents agreed that female performers are more attractive and professional. Even though Lasqi and religious figures regulate their manner on stage, it does not limit the attraction because of the performers themselves and the creativity of

⁶ A long-sleeved blouse worn over the *kain* or sarong.

their trainers.



Transformation of Nasidaria Performance The first Nasidaria album is from the 1980s, the second from the 1990s and the third is contemporary (http://dennysak.multiply.com/journal?&page_start=160)



Female Traditional *Rebana* in the 1980s with Kebaya



Female *Qasidah* Group, Aceh Branch in the 2000s

In this context, it is worth noting that there are also creative responses to *qasidah* 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 movement called Sholawat Kesetaraan (Equal Praising) in Java. The *shalawat*, "songs of praise to the Prophet Muhammad," which are often identified with a tradition of violence and male dominance, are transformed into a medium for spreading the concept of gender equality. Rahima's movement uses local instruments and languages to establish universal human values, such as gender justice, because they believe that the essence of Islam is equality before God:

Oh God, Give always your blessings and salvation to the Prophet Muhammad, to his companion and to those who acknowledge the oneness of God.
Allah created them (human being), male and female, from equal and single self.
Then, He fashioned from both of them and female being
In truth, prosperity has never existed,
Without hard work from both men and women
In truth, justice will never happen in our lifetime,
Unless all of us can try to make it real

The participation of people in building gender equity as implied in the lyrics reflected the process of promoting Sholawat Kesetaraan. AD. Kusumaningtyas, the Documentation and Information Coordinator of Rahima, said that the movement began in 2001 in Jember (East Java) with the training of female Islamic leaders on gender equity issues. These discussions recommended the urgency of emphasizing female agency in the arts and employing cultural media to counter the gender images disseminated in mainstream media. Faqihudin Abdul Kadir wrote the lyrics after discussions with KH.Husein Muhammad, KH.Muhyiddin Abdusshomad, Nyai Hj.Ruqoyyah Ma'shum, and other participants in the forum. In addition, some of them created their own Shalawat Kesetaraan that were suitable for their community. Swara Rahima has continued to promote Sholawat Kesetaraan in its advocacy activities. Like Lasqi, they also

hold festivals for teenage and *majelis ta'lim* (female groups who recite and study Al Quran). Moreover, Swara Rahima collaborated with NUSAE, a UIN Syarif Hidayatullah student band to introduce the Shalawat Kesetaraan to a wider audience, particularly young people (Term of Reference Launching CD Shalawat and Public Discussion 2010). Unfortunately, even though they share similar Islamic cultural interests, it seems that Lasqi and Swara Rahima have their own trajectory and have not built a bridge of collaboration to communicate their mission to create a better life for the *Ummah*.

Conclusion

This preliminary research on *qasidah*, particularly on lyric analysis, shows that *qasidah* has significant gender implications. Over the last twenty years *qasidah* has extended from its rural strength to become more popular in urban areas, with an appeal to all ages but particularly to mature women. The preponderance of women in *qasidah* audiences raises important questions about the messages contained in the lyrics of the songs, the life-styles of the performers and the extent to which men control their conduct on and off stage. This paper has shown that there are many different styles of performing *qasidah*. Some groups, more focused on popular performance, display a tendency towards commodification and commercialization of religious performance. Other groups want to counter the global stereotypes of women, and of Muslim women in particular, as lacking agency of their own. During the New Order the goals of individual groups were complicated because of state's involvement in promoting Islam and in using religious media for its own purposes. 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. On the other hand,

a focus on female agency in some *qasidah* lyrics and in organization leadership demonstrates that *qasidah* has the capacity to serve as a medium of negotiation between genders. Therefore, further research, particularly on performers, performance and reception is needed to explore the extent to which Islamic arts can be an effective media for the socialization of gender equality.

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