

Representation of Women Identity in Qasidah Irama Melayu (QASIMA) on Youtube

Abas Fauzi

Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta

ABSTRACT: This study examines how women's identities are constructed in the Qasidah Irama Melayu (Qasima) musical group through their appearances on YouTube. This phenomenon is significant because the representation of women in Indonesia's religious music scene often sits within a tension between piety, artistic expression, and the demands of digital culture. Using a qualitative approach grounded in discourse analysis and cultural theory, the study draws on Stuart Hall's ideas on identity representation. The findings show that Qasima presents a dynamic and negotiable form of female identity, blending piety with pop aesthetics and hybrid musical practices. Women in Qasima emerge as performative subjects who navigate the boundaries of religious norms and stage aesthetics while also using digital platforms to build legitimacy and religious authority. YouTube becomes a contested arena of representation, revealing both acceptance and resistance toward women's participation in religious music. Through its portrayal of bodies, clothing, and performance styles, Qasima shapes a model of "performative piety" that expands contemporary understandings of religious devotion.

KEYWORDS: Woment Identity, Qasidah Melayu, Youtube, Cultural Hibridity, Mediatization of religion

I. INTRODUCTION

Women, particularly within Javanese cultural settings, have long been regarded as a group considered not yet fully capable of developing an independent mindset or breaking free from the layers of domination that confine them. Their roles, in reality, continue to be defined by an aristocratic feudal power system. Umar Kayam points out that the term *kanca wingking* (literally, "a companion in the back") used to describe women stems from what is considered a refined and noble cultural tradition. Women are believed to play a major role in preserving these noble values within the household. Because of this perceived natural disposition, women are often seen as more suited to working in the domestic sphere.

Women are not second-class human beings who belong only in the background. It is true that, in everyday social realities, domestic responsibilities are more often borne by women than by men. This condition becomes even more pronounced for women who work as dangdut musicians. Male dominance in musical performances, particularly in the dangdut genre, has further marginalized women's positions. Men tend to assume that contemporary women—especially those from Generation Z—prefer pop music, girl bands, Japanese pop culture, K-pop, and similar genres rather than dangdut music.

Today, many women choose a path toward greater independence, commonly known as becoming career women. A career is a dream for many women, whether single or married. They aspire to have professions that generate income and allow them to attain certain positions in the professional world. This aspiration aligns with the idea of women's emancipation, which asserts that women deserve the same recognition and respect as men. Moreover, rising living demands push individuals to demonstrate their best abilities in order to meet their daily needs (Hardandy, 2024).

The ways in which patriarchal society constructs women—and, conversely, men—across public spaces, workplaces, and even private life have become widely accepted as something normal. This kind of normalization flows almost unnoticed in everyday life. Forms of domination do not occur by chance; rather, they are deliberately produced (Fauzi, 2018). This is also evident in the performing arts, particularly in dangdut music performances. Dangdut, a genre often labeled as *kampung* (unsophisticated) and associated with lower- to middle-class tastes, frequently appears across various media platforms, entertainment venues, and even large-scale public events.

Discussions of women in dangdut music performances are inseparable from ongoing controversies. The objectification and stereotyping of women's bodies have long generated opposing viewpoints, with acts deemed vulgar often justified in the name of professionalism within the entertainment industry. Vulgarity, however, does not emerge spontaneously; it is constructed through dominant cultural values. Within the Indonesian cultural context, which tends to uphold norms of modesty, the use of language considered indecent and the display of revealing clothing are commonly viewed as deviations from accepted standards. This situation

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disproportionately affects women, particularly female dangdut singers, who are frequently stigmatized and positioned as the primary agents of practices labeled as vulgar. In fact, if society were to adopt a more permissive cultural framework toward bodily expression and language, such representations in dangdut music might be more readily accepted as legitimate forms of entertainment rather than sources of social controversy (Ferlitasari, 2021).

Such dynamics within the entertainment industry compel music groups to continuously innovate. Market demands and the emergence of new performers are inevitable pressures. One notable example is the emergence of Qasidah Irama Melayu, more widely known as Qasima. Although the group was established in 1984, adopting the stage style of Nasida Ria, Qasima only began appearing on YouTube in 2014. The striking contrast between modest Muslim attire and the energetic rhythms of dangdut koplo creates a form of cultural articulation that warrants closer examination.

In the digital sphere, particularly on YouTube, representations of women in dangdut music are further shaped by the visual culture of new media, where algorithms, video aesthetics, and audience comments actively contribute to the formation of public gender narratives. Digital platforms not only extend the reach of dangdut music but also reinforce existing gender discourses. This makes it crucial to critically examine how women are represented and what social meanings emerge from these representations—whether they merely reproduce patriarchal stereotypes or, alternatively, open up spaces for more empowering forms of female representation.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach with a media and cultural analysis design, aiming to understand the construction and negotiation of women's identities within Qasidah Irama Melayu (Qasima) as presented on YouTube. Grounded in a critical–constructivist paradigm, the research views identity, gender, and religiosity as products of representational practices and power relations within specific socio-cultural contexts. Qasima's YouTube performances are treated as cultural texts that reflect ongoing transformations in religious music and the role of women in digital public spaces.

The analysis is conducted with strong theoretical engagement, drawing on theories of cultural identity (Hall), gender performativity (Butler), cultural hybridity (Bhabha), and the mediatization of religion (Hjarvard) as key analytical tools. These theoretical frameworks function not only as conceptual foundations but also as instruments for data interpretation, enabling close readings of the visual, musical, and discursive representations of women in Qasima's performances. This approach allows the study to move beyond mere description toward a more conceptual understanding of the observed cultural practices.

The research objects consist of selected Qasima YouTube videos, purposively chosen based on criteria such as women's central involvement as performers, consistency in performance format, and levels of digital visibility. Units of analysis include audio-visual performance elements, song lyrics, video narratives, and audience interactions within the comment sections. Data are collected through media observation, digital documentation, and literature review, facilitating a dialogue between empirical findings and existing scholarship.

Data analysis follows a thematic-interpretive and iterative process, linking empirical patterns to relevant conceptual categories. Research validity is ensured through source triangulation, theoretical consistency, and researcher reflexivity in interpreting representations of women and religion. Through this methodological approach, the study offers an in-depth understanding of how women in Qasima construct religious and artistic identities within the context of Islamic popular culture and the mediatization processes of the digital era.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Profile Qasidah Irama Melayu (Qasima)

The music group Qasima was founded in 1984 on the initiative of Sri Andariyah. The group originated from a *rebana* ensemble that regularly performed from house to house. Over time, Sri Andariyah envisioned the formation of an all-female music group—an idea that, at the time, stood in contrast to the dominant practices of dangdut performances commonly featured in mainstream entertainment media. Drawing on qasidah and dangdut genres, Qasima emerged as an innovative presence that introduced a distinctive tone to Indonesia's music entertainment landscape. Another defining feature of the group lies in the predominance of female performers who appear in modest attire, thereby constructing a visual identity that is simultaneously aesthetic and ideological.

The name Qasima is an acronym for *Qasidah Irama Melayu*, which conceptually signals an orientation toward Islamic musical traditions. In practice, however, the group is not confined to a single genre. Qasima frequently performs songs influenced by dangdut, pop, and even reggae, reflecting an adaptive response to market demands and broader audience preferences. This musical flexibility has expanded their listener base, including fans of dangdut koplo, who appreciate not only the diversity of musical styles but also the performers' stage presence. At the same time, Qasima positions music as a medium for *dakwah*, as reflected in their active involvement in various religious activities—particularly *pengajian*—across different regions. This approach demonstrates an effort to integrate popular entertainment with religious values within Qasima's musical practice.

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In line with Qasima's musical character, which remains responsive to market preferences without fully relinquishing its religious identity, the group's presence has been further consolidated through active engagement with various mainstream media platforms. This process of mediatization plays a crucial role in shaping Qasima's representation as a musical group positioned at the intersection of popular entertainment and religious expression. From a media studies perspective, Qasima's visibility in the public sphere reflects not only artistic strategies but also a capacity to negotiate the logics of the cultural industry and the expectations of a heterogeneous audience.

In 2018, Qasima gained national recognition through its involvement in *Salam Religi 2018: Sambut Ramadan Penuh Cinta*. Within this program, Qasima was listed among the artists who released an album under the Nagaswara label, a recording company that holds a strategic position within Indonesia's music industry. This collaboration marked a significant phase in Qasima's professional trajectory, particularly in expanding the distribution of their work within the mainstream music industry.

Qasima's achievements continued in 2021 when the group received the *Dangdut Terhayang* award at the *Jateng Music Awards*. In addition to the group award, several Qasima members were individually recognized, including honors for *Seruling Terhayang* and *Pengendang Terhayang*. These accolades highlight not only the collective cohesion of the group but also the musical competence and professionalism of its individual members.

In 2024, Qasima attained further symbolic legitimacy at the national level through an invitation to perform as the opening guest on *Aksi Asia*, a program broadcast by Indosiar. *Aksi Asia* is a televised da'i talent competition aired during the pre-dawn (*sahur*) hours throughout the month of Ramadan. Qasima's appearance on the program reinforces their position as a musical group capable of mediating between popular entertainment and religious content within the landscape of national mass media.

B. YouTube as an Arena of Representational Contestation

In the context of digital media, YouTube functions not merely as a distribution platform for audio-visual content, but also as a space where meanings, identities, and values are continuously negotiated. As a participatory medium, YouTube enables various actors—content creators, audiences, and platform algorithms—to engage in the production and circulation of representations. This dynamic positions YouTube as an arena of contestation, where dominant norms intersect with alternative interpretations, particularly in relation to gender, religion, and popular culture.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/@qasimamanagement551/videos>

Within this arena, representations of women in religious and popular music are subject to both affirmation and resistance. Audience responses in the form of comments, likes, and shares reveal diverse interpretations, ranging from acceptance and admiration to criticism grounded in moral and religious considerations. These interactions illustrate how YouTube does not simply reflect social realities, but actively shapes public discourse by amplifying certain voices while marginalizing others. Consequently, representations presented on YouTube become unstable and open to continuous reinterpretation.

For groups such as Qasidah Irama Melayu (Qasima), YouTube provides a strategic space to negotiate visibility, legitimacy, and authority. Through visual presentation, performance style, and musical arrangement, Qasima constructs particular narratives of female religiosity that may challenge or reconfigure conventional expectations. At the same time, the platform exposes these representations to public scrutiny, making YouTube a critical site for understanding how cultural meanings are contested, negotiated, and transformed in the digital era.

Drawing on Theory of Representation Stuart Hall (1997), representation is understood not merely as a reflection of reality but as a process through which specific social meanings are constructed. The presence of hijab-wearing women performing actively

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on the dangdut music stage on YouTube negotiates two regimes of representation: religious feminine identity and women's roles as performers within popular music culture.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough), it becomes evident that the visual and auditory narratives embedded in the video intervene in patriarchal cultural hegemony. Rather than positioning women solely as bodily objects, the video foregrounds their musical competence and performative agency, thereby situating women as cultural actors and aesthetic producers within the musical production process. Within Indonesia's patriarchal social context, such representation holds the potential to disrupt conventional portrayals that confine women to passive roles or reduce them to mere visual appeal.

Nevertheless, even as women appear as central actors, it is important to acknowledge that the structures of production—such as song selection, stage design, and sonic framing—remain shaped by the dynamics of the digital music industry and by audience expectations on YouTube. As a platform operating within an attention economy, YouTube incentivizes content that maximizes visibility and engagement, often encouraging visual framing that incorporates eye-catching aesthetics to increase viewer interaction and view counts.

Furthermore, although this study does not directly analyze comment sections, YouTube functions as a space of public discourse in which meanings are continuously produced and negotiated through comments, likes, and other engagement metrics. Audience responses to the performances of female performers may either reinforce or undermine the meanings constructed by the video's primary visual representations.

C. Body Politics and the Reconstructions of Pious Identity

In his study of contemporary religious music, Barendregt (2011) notes that trends in popular Islam in Southeast Asia have increasingly moved toward entertainment-oriented aesthetics that emphasize expressivity while retaining religious symbols. Qasima aligns with this broader phenomenon, yet extends it by positioning women at the center of creative production rather than relegating them to supporting roles, as was common in traditional qasidah groups of the 1980s. Conceptually, this demonstrates that the women in Qasima actively participate in the production of contemporary Islamic identities rather than merely receiving or reproducing them. They emerge as active agents who shape how piety is performed, displayed, and interpreted within the public sphere.



Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h_9K_V2NMs

In the video, female performers appear as singers and musicians who actively play instruments and perform on stage. This visualization positions women as subjects of musical production rather than as passive objects of spectatorship. Such representation departs from traditional stereotypes in which women in dangdut music are often reduced to bodily display or sensual appeal. Nevertheless, the visual dimension warrants critical reading. All performers are shown wearing hijab during the performance, a choice that significantly shapes the interpretation of female bodily representation. In this context, the hijab may be understood as a symbol of religious identity that coexists with the popular music genre of dangdut, thereby producing a form of feminine representation that is not solely sexualized but also explicitly religious.

Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the female identity constructed by Qasima can be understood as a set of repeated acts that produce particular gendered effects. Energetic stage performances, the use of modern yet religious attire, and the positioning of female vocals at the center of the performance do not constitute naturalistic representations; rather, they function as performative practices that challenge conservative gender constructions. Previous studies on women in Islamic music (Husein, 2016; Rasmussen, 2010) suggest that women are often perceived as problematic within performance spaces, as their bodies are socially constructed as potential sources of *fitnah*. In contrast, Qasima actively counters this assumption by carefully crafting stage aesthetics that position women not as visual objects but as professional subjects within musical production.

Accordingly, Qasima's performativity contributes to a reinterpretation of the Muslim female body—not as a source of moral disruption, but as a spiritual and aesthetic medium endowed with renewed social legitimacy. Conceptually, this positions Qasima as advancing a model of performative piety that enables women to express religious identity through artistic practice without forfeiting religious authority.

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The religious-modern attire worn by Qasima forms part of what Mahmood (2005) describes as *embodied piety*—a mode of piety expressed through the body and everyday practices. However, Qasima does not merely display a form of piety that conforms to traditional norms; rather, it articulates an aestheticized piety, presented through bright colors, choreographed movement, and high-energy stage performances.

Studies on popular Islamic aesthetics (Deeb & Harb, 2013) indicate that younger Muslim generations are shaping new, consumer-friendly styles of religiosity. Qasima, however, offers a distinct emphasis. Rather than simply aligning with market-driven aesthetics, the group actively renegotiates the boundaries of female piety by presenting bodies that are visibly active, creative, and professional. In doing so, Qasima extends the concept of *embodied piety* toward what may be understood as *piety-in-performance*—a form of piety constructed through stage action, musical professionalism, and collective female expression.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Research on the Representation of Women in *Qasidah Irama Melayu* (Qasima) on YouTube reveals that the identity of Muslim women in digital religious art is neither static nor purely normative, but rather the result of complex cultural negotiations. Qasima presents women as active performative subjects who shape narratives of piety, aesthetics, and professionalism through a fusion of qasidah traditions, pop music elements, and media logic. The representation of women in the Qasima group demonstrates that piety does not have to be positioned in opposition to artistic expression. Instead, it can be embodied through performative practices, bodily aesthetics, and musical creativity.

YouTube functions as a contested space of representation, enabling women to increase their visibility while simultaneously encountering resistance. The identities that emerge—hybrid, dynamic, and reflective of digital culture—portray Indonesian Muslim women as cultural agents capable of redefining the boundaries of modesty, religious authority, and artistic expression in contemporary society. In this sense, Qasima is not merely a musical phenomenon, but also a cultural practice that signals significant transformations in the relationships among gender, religion, and media in the digital era. Furthermore, this article concludes that popular music media operate as ideological arenas in which gender meanings are produced, negotiated, and contested, resulting in non-homogeneous forms of gender representation. These findings underscore the need for further research that focuses more closely on specific musical genres and examines the broader socio-cultural implications of gender representation within popular music.

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