



Bissu on Contesting Indigeneity with Islamic Puritanism in the Sacred Arena

The presence of Islam in the Bugis Bone tribe not only changes people's beliefs but also traditional activities such as wedding rituals, *mappalili* (traditional ceremonies before planting rice), guarding *arajang* (heirlooms). The positions of Bissu, who is an indigenous leader, are very influential in the Bugis Bone community, but nowadays, its existence is discredited by the presence of Islamic hegemony. This research focuses on the transformation of the perseverance of Bissu in the leadership of traditional rituals in the Bugis Bone Tribe, before and after interacting with Islamic religious values. This study uses a descriptive method that describes the social conditions in the life of Bissu, by observation and interview techniques to the Bissu, Muslim leaders, and cultural actor. This study found the fact that the existence of Islam had a dominant influence on the social status of Bissu, which resulted in their role as leaders of traditional rituals being less respected by the community. The role of Bissu in daily activities has become less involved because it has been replaced by the values of religious puritanism. The government needs to educate the history of Bissu and the cultural traditions of Bone to the public and young generation.

Keywords: Bissu; Indigenous Religion; Traditional Rituals; Religious Puritanism

Kehadiran Islam di suku Bugis Bone tidak hanya mengubah keyakinan masyarakat tetapi juga aktivitas adat seperti ritual pernikahan, *mappalili* (upacara adat sebelum menanam padi), dan menjaga *arajang* (pusaka). Kedudukan Bissu yang merupakan tokoh adat sangat berpengaruh dalam masyarakat Bugis Bone, namun saat ini eksistensinya terdiskreditkan dengan hadirnya hegemoni Islam. Penelitian ini berfokus pada transformasi ketekunan Bissu dalam memimpin ritual adat Suku Bugis Bone, sebelum dan sesudah berinteraksi dengan nilai-nilai agama Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif yang menggambarkan kondisi sosial kehidupan Bissu, dengan teknik observasi dan wawancara kepada Bissu, tokoh agama Islam, dan budayawan. Studi ini menemukan fakta bahwa keberadaan Islam memiliki pengaruh dominan terhadap status sosial Bissu, yang mengakibatkan peran mereka sebagai pemimpin ritual adat kurang dihargai oleh masyarakat. Peran Bissu dalam aktivitas sehari-hari menjadi kurang terlibat karena tergantikan oleh nilai-nilai puritanisme agama. Pemerintah perlu mengedukasi sejarah Bissu dan tradisi-tradisi budaya Bugis Bone kepada masyarakat dan generasi muda.

Kata Kunci: Bissu; Agama Leluhur; Ritual Tradisional; Puritanisme Agama

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Introduction

There has been a religious hegemony that has led to discriminatory attitudes towards a minority group.¹ The power of hegemony established in religion can slowly replace and change the belief system, which is already in the understanding of society, either through the easy way or through the hard way.² Hegemony can implement religious values to the surrounding environment, although the features and habits of a tradition will never be lost.³ The negative result of this hegemony is a form of discrimination that continues, from the early days to the present, which consciously or unconsciously continues as a general truth, so seeing religion not only as a path of wisdom but also as an exercise of power.⁴ Like Bissu, a term derived from the ancient Bugis era is defined as a multitalented leader in the area of religion and tradition in the Bone tribe of South Sulawesi. Bissu's presence had a very significant influence on the kingdom and the local community.⁵

The worst effects of hegemony erased Bissu's existence. Deep-rooted beliefs lead people to make innovations to rise in the present. Even though these innovations are imitation products whose sacred values have been reduced. The presence of these innovations also ultimately leads to negative things, because the person present is not the person who was like in the early days of the belief. Today, the position of Bissu varies from being a spiritual leader to a bridal make-up artist (*into botting*), a

shaman (*sandro*), a performer, or a diplomat.⁶ Rituals led by Bissu move away from religious values. The changing role of Bissu reveals how indigenous religion interacts with its surrounding context, so the ritual led by Bissu moves away from the value of religiosity.

The changing role faced by Bissu as one of the indigenous religions is a fascinating issue to discuss. After the authors saw the previous article, several researchers in Indonesia have researched about Bissu, and have questions similar to this paper, such as the gender priority of Bissu in the Bugis community, the gender of Bissu does not refer to a specific, even though the Bissu is a man.⁷ Imran in the following year explained the complexity of the relationship between Bissu, as bearers of pre-Islamic local religions, meeting Islam as a new religion in the kingdom of South Sulawesi. Imran shows how Bissu conducts negotiations to maintain their existence.⁸

Imran's research and this paper have similar characteristics but have a different angle of study in the area of Bissu position. Furthermore, this study is in line with Triadi's research, which found discrimination of Bissu, both in the realm of belief and in the area of gender. These findings also show that the state plays a role in the discrimination of Bissu.⁹ Triadi's result has not explained those causal factors, so this paper aims to fill the gap left by previous researchers. This paper focuses on analyzing the Bissu position, which used to have a strategic role that has changed over time. This change is motivated by the great power of Islam that dominates Indonesia.¹⁰ Islamic influence ultimately reduces the value placed on

¹ Mara Albrecht, "Ritual Performances and Collective Violence in Divided Cities – The Riots in Belfast (1886) and Jerusalem (1929)," *Political Geography* (2021): 6.

² Errol Babacan, "Hegemony and Privileges: Reproduction of Islamism in Turkey," in *Regime Change in Turkey: Neoliberal Authoritarianism, Islamism and Hegemony*, 2021: 1-6.

³ Faviola Rivera-Castro, "Neutrality without Pluralism," *European Journal of Political Theory* (2021): 233.

⁴ Pam Fox Kuhlken, "'Dear World Religions 101 Professor: Some Essentials About Non-Essentializing,'" *Religion and Education* (2021): 247.

⁵ Abdul Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance," (East Halmahera, 2010): 1. <https://www.academia.edu/6172991/>

⁶ Feby Triadi, "Bissu and Toboto Domain; Lanskap, Islam, dan Negosiasi," *ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2019): 73.

⁷ Titiek Suliyati, "Bissu: Keistimewaan Gender Dalam Tradisi Bugis," *Endogami: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Antropologi* 2, no. 1 (2018): 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Feby Triadi, "Bissu; Kepercayaan, Perilaku, dan Kewarganegaraan," *Panngadereng* 6 (2020): 145–158.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*





local religion in the Bugis community. This paper examines a potent relationship in historical relations, such as how the foundations of local religion have an important role in shaping traditions and rituals in society.

The data used as the basis for the analysis in this article was obtained through interviews and literature studies. Researchers interviewed three Bone communities who have a significant position in providing information. First: religious leaders, who have been a socio-religious reference for the community. Second: Cultural, people who are heavily involved in traditional rituals in the Bone area. Third: Bissu, as cultural actors and leaders of certain traditional rituals in Bone.

General Overview of the Topic

Research from Wayan and Rahayu states that the term Bissu is similar to the Buddhist term "Monk", although there have been subsequent development in the meaning of Bissu in Buddhism. Bissu is identical with Sanatama Dharma based on the concepts of Dewata, Bhatara, and Dewata Seuwae.¹¹ Bissu always uses water and fire symbols in their rituals. This also occurs in Buddhism, using water as a spiritual source (*Patirta*). Sanatama Dharma spread this concept, which is not found in other religions.¹²

Hakim referred to Sharyn Graham's (2001) explanation that there have been four Bissu roles in the Bugis community.¹³ First, Bissu has been a conveyor between humans and God, through traditional rituals and ceremonies in which Bissu uses the language of *Torilangi* or the language of God. Bissu asks God for help to

achieve fertility and peace in the world. Second, Bissu has been guardian and occupant of a sacred place called *Arajang*. It was a book of ' *La Galigo*' which they kept sacred. In addition, Bissu has had a role in implementing the traditional life cycle ceremonies, such as the ceremonies of pregnancy, birth, marriage, and death. The last of Bissu's roles was as an advisor to the king in making decisions. Mutual gender, mortal, and deity were the strengths of the Bissu in carrying out this work.¹⁴

During the Kingdom of Bone, the Bissu gathered in one shelter which was known as the *Bissu Patappuloe*, a community that had 40 Bissu members. Suliyati refers to Latief¹⁵ who explained that the word *calabai* comes from *cala/sala*, which means "not" and the word *bai/baine* which means "woman". Thus, it can be said that *calabai* means not women. *Calabai tungke'na lino* is a *calabai* who has no sexual orientation. This is what makes them special in communicating with the gods and all spirits. This *Calabai tuangke'na lino* became what is now known as Bissu.¹⁶

Bissu has extensive knowledge about customs, traditions, family tree, social life, the life of the gods, mastering medicine, and things related to mysticism. There are two categories of Bissu; 1) *Bissu Dewata* is a Bissu who is born through orders from the gods. This Bissu has high qualifications in science and knowledge. 2) *Bissu Mamata* is Bissu that comes from the process of meeting and desire from the heart. Bissu holds different titles. Bissu which can heal like a shaman is called *Sanro*. Bissu who can

¹¹ I Made Gami Sandi Untara and Ni Wayan Sri Rahayu, "Bissu: Ancient Bugis Priest (Perspective On The Influence Of Hindu Civilization In Bugis Land)," *Vidyottama Sanatana: International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 243–249.

¹² Ibid.; Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance. (2010): 2"

¹³ Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance." (2010): 1-2.

¹⁴ Muhaemin Elmahady, "Islam Dan Kearifan Lokal Di Sulawesi Selatan Pasca Islamisasi," *Hikmah* VII, no. 1 (2011): 83–104; Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance." (2010): 1-2.

¹⁵ Halilintar Latief, *Bissu: Pergulatan Dan Peranannya Di Masyarakat Bugis* (Makassar: Desantara, 2004): 38.

¹⁶ Purwaningsih Purwaningsih, "Transgender dalam Novel Calabai Karya Pepi al Bayqunie: Kajian Identitas," *Aksara* (2017); Suliyati, "Bissu: Keistimewaan Gender Dalam Tradisi Bugis." (2018): 55.





communicate with spirits using the language of the gods is known as *Bissu Dewata'e*.¹⁷

Religion in Bugis Bone Tribe

A. Indigenous Religion in Bugis Tribe

The explanation about Bissu *La Galigo* legitimizes the existence of Bissu, who knows the desires of the gods. Bissu is the connector between the human world and the world of the gods.¹⁸ The text also states that the emergence of Bissu is the emergence of the Bugis community.¹⁹ Bissu in its representation is a holy person who is far from negative things, as a local religious leader of the Bugis community.²⁰

The ceremonies of Bissu leaders are taken to protect them from evil. They implement this in the rituals of life. These ceremonies originate from the belief of the Bugis people, which is a religion that means "ancestral role models" or "ancestral procedures."²¹ The principle of this belief comes from the customs and rules of life that have been passed down by their ancestors. These values are maintained or cared for by the community, which ultimately leads to performing worship or rituals to the gods and ancestors.²²

This belief is known as *attoriolong* which existed before the arrival of Islam. Rituals focused on god, the ancestors, and subtle creatures. ²³ *Attoriolong* means following

ancestral practices, inheriting the values, guidelines, rules, and norms in people's lives. *Attoriolong* is a paradigm that has several institutions such as worldly life (*atuwong ri lino*), meaning that whoever comes to the world will be granted life. The second principle is the existence of the Hereafter or eternity (*esso ri munri* or *pammasareng*) due to the belief that the world has two types, real and non-real. The third belief, Sickness, and Death (*lasa na Sangateng*) posits that all diseases are the cause of previous actions. The fourth belief states that in the world of the gods (*Dewatae*), there is a highest god in charge of managing all world affairs. In the *La Galigo* script, this belief is in one single god. This god is *Patoto-e* (who determines fate) and *Tenrie A'rana* (the high of desire). *Dewata Seuwae* is the central power of humans, animals, and other creatures, including spirits, the living, and the dead who all depend on it.

In *Attoriolong*, there are groups that help *Dewata Seuwae*. The first is the god of heaven (*dewata langie*) it is in charge of bringing down rain or lightning, and bringing drought. They served food in the form of four colors of rice and kept it on their rooftop, so the gods would not be angry. The second is the god of earth (*dewata mallinoe*), who lives in big trees, big rocks, the center of the earth (*posi tana / posi bola*), and so on. In his honor, they serve eggs, some banana combs, chicken, and four different colors of rice. The third is the god of water (*Dewata uwae*) who lives in water. They dissolve unripe eggs, four different colors of rice as a form of respect for the gods.²⁴

This belief exists because people believe in powers beyond human capabilities, so they do rituals to maintain harmonious relations between humans and gods. The fourth group is supernatural beings (*tau tenrita*), who are also called illusory humans. The fifth group, ancestors (*tau rioloe*) are believed to be present

¹⁷ Triadi, "Bissu; Kepercayaan, Perilaku, dan Kewarganegaraan"; Suliyati, "Bissu: Keistimewaan Gender dalam Tradisi Bugis." (2018): 55.

¹⁸ Imran, "Bissu: Genealogi Dan Tegangannya Dengan Islam," *MIMIKRI* 5, no. 1 (2019): 98; Ridhwan, "Kepercayaan Masyarakat Bugis Pra Islam," *Ekspose: Jurnal Penelitian Hukum dan Pendidikan* (2018): 489.

¹⁹ Christian Pelras, *The Bugis, Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*, 1996: 69.

²⁰ Sri Nurohim, "Identitas dan Peran Gender pada Masyarakat Suku Bugis," *Sosietas* (2018): 457-458; Pelras, *The Bugis*, 187.

²¹ Latief, *Bissu: Pergulatan Dan Peranannya Di Masyarakat Bugis* (2004): 39.

²² Sahajuddin Sahajuddin, "Agama dan Sosial Politik Kerajaan Tanete Terhadap Kerajaan Lain pada Abad XVII," *Walusuji: Jurnal Sejarah dan Budaya* (2016): 346.

²³ Untara and Rahayu, "Bissu: Ancient Bugis Priest (Perspective on the Influence of Hindu Civilization

in Bugis Land)" (2020): 15; Triadi, "Bissu; Kepercayaan, Perilaku, dan Kewarganegaraan." (2020): 15.

²⁴ Latief, *Bissu: Pergulatan Dan Peranannya Di Masyarakat Bugis*. (2004): 12-14.





in all the bodies of the next generation. The sixth group, Sacred and Shakti (*makerrek*) are believed to hold supernatural powers that occur in events. The seventh, amulets (*ulawu na simak*), are believed to protect those who use them. Finally, offerings (*massompa*) are believed to teach those who do not enact commendable deeds. This belief encourages the emergence of religious behavior in communal social life. These rituals are ceremonies of worship that keep them from various disasters.

Bird-David also conveys the belief that "all life is produced by a spiritual force, or that all natural phenomena have souls."²⁵ This belief causes them to worship their ancestors or worship objects that are considered to have power. This concept indicates one should be more mindful about what exists outside the soul, and what is invisible, beyond reason, or illogical yet makes an enormous impact on human life. Such forces were not created by humans but can affect them. Belief in a spiritual force is what drives people to rationalize all the elements of life, for instance, birth, death, weather, or natural disaster. All-natural phenomena respond to how humans treat nature, whether beneficial or damaging.

B. The First Wave of Islam in Bone: Assimilation and Acculturation

Islam has long influenced the Bugis community. However, the people of South Sulawesi already had local faiths before Islam arrived. Thus, the focus of Muslim scholars in the early years was on inner filling. They also applied Islamic values that were not in line with Islamic teachings. Muslim scholars did not change rituals directly, but wisely replaced or combined them with Islamic teachings.²⁶

²⁵ Nurit Bird-david et al., "Animism 'Revisited'" 40 (1999): 67.

²⁶ Hasse J, "Dinamika Hubungan Islam Dan Agama Lokal Di Indonesia: Pengalaman Towani Tolotang Di Sulawesi Selatan," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* (2016): 180-183.

Three Datuks from West Sumatra, namely, Datuk Patimang, Datuk ri Tiro, and Datuk ri Bandang, took a structural and cultural approach to the monarchy, customs, and traditions of the local community. These three Datuks were experts in the field of Sufism, so the Islam that flourished in South Sulawesi at this time was mystical. This was a wise step in communicating with existing beliefs embedded in the community, which have been studied in the manuscript *La Galigo* or ancient Lontara.²⁷

Panngaderreng is a concept of harmony that contains local culture and Islamic values. *Pangngadereng* is a system of noble norms and rules that have become the foundation of the Bugis community, in behaving and interacting with all the creations in the world²⁸. These norms interact with religious customs which ultimately present the concept of *sara'*. The *sara'* has become a process of Islamification in the system *panngaderreng*, in which the values of customs and community life became: *ada'*, *rappang*, *wari'*, *bicara*, and *sara'*.²⁹

The next factor influenced by the spread of Islam was the belief in the *Dewata Seuwae*, a belief in a single deity.³⁰ This concept is the first gateway to finding common value between the traditions of the pre-Islamic Bugis community and the Islamic tradition. The belief explains that there is one great power outside the self that manages the whole universe. The concept of *To Manurung* makes Islam more easily accepted in the community of Bone. *Toillustrate* this concept, when the king of Bone became a Muslim, the local people followed because the king was considered a representation of the gods on Earth.

²⁷ Anzar Abdullah, "Islamisasi di Sulawesi Selatan dalam Perspektif Sejarah," *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* (2016): 79.

²⁸ Triadi, "Bissu; Kepercayaan, Perilaku, dan Kewarganegaraan." (2020): 147.

²⁹ Abdullah, "Islamisasi di Sulawesi Selatan dalam Perspektif Sejarah." (2016): 91.

³⁰ Nurfadillah, "Negosiasi Kepercayaan Toriologi Dengan Agama Islam Pada Bissu Dan Masyarakat Bugis Makassar," *Sosioreligius* (2019): 13.





From 1611-1626, Islam became the official religion of the kingdom under the leadership of Bone King La Tenri Toakkappeang Sultan Abdullah XII.³¹ Furthermore, in the period of King La Maddaremmeng XIII made a breakthrough by forming a group of sharia officials (*parewa sara'*) of which later aspects were incorporated into *pangngadereng*. Currently, these officials work with the general government called *parewa ade'* (customary offices), which is filled by Bissu.³²

Bissu were called to act as the highest officials of government and at the same time as religious advisors. At the time Bissu were increasingly being replaced by *sara'*, especially *Kadhi* which became a determinant in implementing *sara'* law or *ade'* law. This change also determined some of the ceremonies that Bissu led which were taken over by *puang kali* or *Kadhi*.³³

King of Bone La Patau Matanna Tikka or Sultan Alimuddin Idris XIV (1696-1714) was a king who had mastered several religious sciences. In this period the kingdom already had *langgar* or *Mushallah* which was established as a center of worship and education. With the Sultan's presence, religious institutions integrated teachings of Islam into Bugis society. At this time, the ceremonies in the Bissu community were already in conflict with Islamic values, so there was a mixing of Islamic values and local traditions.³⁴

Furthermore, the influence of Islam is evident in the implementation of the cycle life ceremony. This ceremony is a process of moving from one phase of life to another, starting from birth, to marriage, and death. Bissu roles at this

time began to be replaced; for example, the prayers in marriage were transferred to *Khadi*.³⁵ The first wave of Islam tended to negotiate between cultural traditions and Islamic values, bringing Islamic law together with local beliefs.

C. The Second Wave of Islam in Bone: Puritanism

The 1950s to 1960s saw the growth of the rebellion of Darul Islam / Islamic Army in Indonesia. This group focused on applying Islamic values to a pluralistic society. At the time of the rebellion of Kahar Muzakkar, many Bissu, *arajang*, or places of Bissu *regalia'* and equipment were destroyed and thrown into the sea. During this period there was a gender restriction placed on Bissu, who were required to act as men.³⁶

The hegemony of puritan Islam intimidated local religious customs led by Bissu.³⁷ The rituals performed by Bissu were considered as *khurafat*, and even polytheism. Puritan Muslims destroyed, burned, and killed Bissu who did not want to repent. This period was the worst period for Bissu in Bugis. Kahar Muzakkar destroyed all cultural and traditional customs led by the Bissu group.³⁸

South Sulawesi was affected by the religious renaissance movement of Indonesia. This movement emphasized the purification of Islamic teachings that come from the Koran or hadith. The rejection of Bissu at this time was based on the assumption that Bissu do not fulfill the genders described in Islamic teachings. The

³¹ Rahmawati Rahmawati and Mohd. Azizuddin Mohd. Sani, "Transformasi Budaya Islam Di Kerajaan Bone Pada Abad Ke XVII," *Jurnal Adabiyah* (2016): 32.

³² Ridwan Asrul Nur Iman et al., "A Study of Transvestites: The Self-Presentation of Bissu," *Journal of Social Sciences Research* (2018): 70-71.

³³ Ahmad I Indarwati, L Mariana, and S Rachman, "Ritual Para Bissu, Para Waria Sakti Di Kabupaten Bone," *Jurnal Idiomatic* (2018): 16-17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ Petsy Jessy Ismoyo, "Decolonizing Gender Identities in Indonesia: A Study of Bissu 'The Trans-Religious Leader' in Bugis People," *Paradigma: Jurnal Kajian Budaya* (2020): 282-283.

³⁶ Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia From Glory to Disappearance." (2012): 4.

³⁷ Imran, "Bissu: Genealogi dan Tegangannya dengan Islam." (2019): 97.

³⁸ Ismoyo, "Decolonizing Gender Identities in Indonesia: A Study of Bissu 'The Trans-Religious Leader' in Bugis People." (2020): 284-285.





movement was committed to resetting the Bissu character according to Islamic teachings.³⁹

The governmental regime named “*Operasi Toba*” (operation of repentance) menaced the Bissu. State officials’ understanding of other religious elements led to the failure of local religious traditions led by Bissu. At the time they also thought of the ritual as a non-religious custom with animist characteristics.⁴⁰ *Operasi Toba*’ was an effort to purify the teachings of Bissu in South Sulawesi. Bissu were under pressure to choose one of the official religions in Indonesia, if they did not vote they would be killed.⁴¹

In 1965 the area was destroyed based on the stigma that it was a hiding place for members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).⁴² After *Operasi Toba* from 1970 to the 1980s, the *mapalili* ceremony for rice planting no longer involved the Bissu, even though the presence of Bissu at the *mappalili* is believed as an essential element in determining the success of the rice harvest. Bissu Saidi, an influential figure, was considered capable of communicating with God for the success of rice cultivation.⁴³

At this time, some scholars believed that Bissu was a community of the past, whose practices and characteristics must not be part of daily activities in the community because it would contradict Islamic values. Therefore, Bissu had no place to exist in society.⁴⁴ The teachings of Islam were unable to accept the meaning of Bissu ritual and gender. Thus, began

misunderstandings about the position of Bissu.⁴⁵ It explained by Bissu Angel (2020):

“...Narekko dipammulai ritual e, engka mantra nennia baca-baca’ diaseng Bahasa memmang iyanaro diaseng bahasa to rilangi, massompa ri dewatae. Deagage unsur selleng, makkokkoe, nasaba iya’ aleku mattama selleng, uppammulai ritual e ubaca Bismillah, silaingeng Bissu riolo ya de’na selleng, massompa ripuang Dewata seuwae ...”

Translation:

“...If the ritual is started, there is a dimension called ‘*Bahasa memmang*’ (prayer & dhikr) or in other words the language of the heavens, this is intended for the creator. There is no element of Islam, but now because I have embraced Islam so I start the ritual by reading Basmalah, unlike the senior of Bissu who are not Muslim and worship *Dewata seuwae*...”

The concept of gender in Islam restricts the meaning of Bissu gender. Islamic leaders force Bissu to become Muslim to get gender identity. Bissu makes strategies for self-defense and protection, using the attributes of Islamic ideas in their ritual ceremonies, such as saying *Bismillāhi al-rahmān al-rahīm* (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) to open a ritual, and reciting *Alḥamdu li-Allāh* (all praise is due to God) after it ends.

Bissu on Costenting Indigeneity

A. The Current Bissu Position

In 1957 the Bugis Kingdom was officially closed, however, activities were still going informally. In this period, the position of the kingdom decreased because the royal system transitioned to a government system.⁴⁶ The ineffectiveness of the royal system was one of the factors causing this decline in the importance of Bissu. When countered by the

³⁹ Imran, “Bissu: Genealogi dan Tegangannya dengan Islam.” (2019): 101.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hakim, “A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance.” (2012): 5.

⁴² Triadi, “Bissu and Toboto Domain; Lanskap, Islam, Dan Negosiasi.” (2019): 78.

⁴³ Pelras, *The Bugis*; (2006): 72; Hakim, “A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance.” (2012): 21.

⁴⁴ Hakim, “A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance.” (2012): 5

⁴⁵ Yusran, ““ Bissu ” Bukan Waria,” *Sosioireligius* (2018): 69-70.

⁴⁶ Sharyn Graham Davies, *Gender Diversity in Indonesia* (Obor, 2018): 280.





development of Islam, the rituals which the Bissu led became powerless.

Some historical factors suggest that Bissu traditions cannot stay, because of the significant influence of Islam in the kingdom. Influence started from Sultan Alaudin, a king of Gowa who accepted Islam as the official religion of Gowa. After Islam became the basis of the kingdom, positions once held by Bissu were led by the *Qadi or Imam*. The rituals that usually involved and were led by Bissu eventually lost. In 1966 the ceremony mapalili was simplified from forty days to seven days, and today it is only held for three days.⁴⁷

The beliefs held by Bissu began to disappear with the acceptance of Islamic teachings in the kingdom. The Bugis community has begun to leave their ancestral beliefs, although some traditional rituals are still being carried out⁴⁸ is made clear from an interview with Puang Andi Baso Bone, who stated that the DI / TII Incident in the 1940s reduced the number of Bissu. The event was led by the Kahar Muzakkar group that was struggling to create an Islamic state.⁴⁹ Bone stated (2020):

"... Riolo, Bissu mattebbang pohon untuk makebbu bola, Bissu mabbaca-baca diolona pohon e nasaba mappatabe ripada anjajingenna dewatae. Tapi Kahar Muzakkar ya pemimpinna DI/TII denapahang i, naaseng napaddua puangge ..."

Translation:

"...At that time, when Bissu wanted to cut down a tree to build a house, they asked permission in front of the tree to respect their fellow-creatures. In line with that, Kahar Muzakkar as DI/TII leaders did not accept it due it was considered an act of polytheism..."

⁴⁷ Triadi, "BISSU ; KEPERCAYAAN , PERILAKU , DAN KEWARGANEGARAAN." (2020): 8-10.

⁴⁸ Davies, *Gender Diversity in Indonesia*. Obor, 2018): 280; Perlas (1996): 201.

⁴⁹ Taufik Ahmad, "Mengail di Air Keruh: Gerakan PKI di Sulawesi Selatan 1950-1965," *Patanjala: Jurnal Penelitian Sejarah an Budaya* (2014): 301-314.

The fact of history shows the domination of intervention and misinterpretation of religious minorities. For instance, when Bissu cut trees to make a house, Bissu makes offerings to ask permission from trees because they have rights like other beings. This interpretation of the relationship between humans and nature is not understood by the DI / TII group. They claim that the Bissu ritual is a form of shirk. They believe this tradition must be stopped, so as not to damage the community's faith.

This phenomenon results from different comprehensions of religion. Frank stated, "The world religion paradigm is a perspective that aims to distinguish, variegating, consolidating, and totalizing aspects related to social, cultural, and politics among common religions."⁵⁰

This world religion paradigm establishes a narrow and limited understanding of the meaning of religion. There are different ways politicians decide whether a group is religious or not religious. Belief systems are understood as religions that have a large number of worshipers, holy books, or places of worship, etc. If a group does not have the same aspects, they will be excluded from the category of religion. There is the concept of World Religion, a manifestation of European intellectual history. At that time, according to Bone, (2020):

"... Bissu ya wettue ro diareng pilihan untuk mattama selleng atau tette manjaji Bissu, tapi narekko manjaji selleng wajib botting na punna wija. Narekko tette manjaji Bissu diuno na ditunu..."

Translation:

"...Bissu at that time were given a choice, whether they wanted to embrace Islam or remain Bissu, with the consequence of getting married and having children. Meanwhile, if it remains a Bissu, it will be killed and burned..."

⁵⁰ Mesuzawa, "The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Review)," *University of Chicago Press* (2005): 20.





The Bissu were given a choice to act like men or remain openly Bissu, with the consequence that if they chose to become men, they had to marry and have children. If they chose to openly remain Bissu, they were killed. However, with the principle of *sumange'* (mercy) they could not be burned or hurt with weapons. This is based on the history of Bissu as holy persons who have been refugees and victims of religious puritanism. Some Bissu converted to Islam and left the tradition. They adjusted to people who chose Islam because of the minority's beliefs.

This hegemony is very destructive. Many Bissu have been marginalized and even killed, and they are not given the right to be in society. This tragedy was made clear by Bissu Angel that at that time Bissu was the target of religious groups who called themselves the most right. Universalizing ultimately idealizes religion in a harmful way.⁵¹ After the attack carried out by the DI / TII group, the only two Bissu survivors were Pallolo Boko and Deng Tawero. These Bissu are the last generation, who experienced the transition from a kingdom to a government. This discrimination not only affects the position of the Bissu but also affect the rituals and ceremony in the Bugis Bone community. Back in 2020, Andi Baso Bone stated:

"... rolo, wettu dijama ritual mappalili, pappada maneng wettuna sekali setahun. Tapi makkokoe si betta-bettanggi tauwe. Iyanaro manjaji masalah, nasaba riolo bottinge pura paneng, makkokoe nasaba tradisi wettu ritual e terkikis, maega mattampu depa nabotting nasaba penghasilanna dari mappanen denaseimbang..."

Translation:

"...mappalili rituals which were done together at one time, have changed. This had created new problems in the community, such as the emergence of jealousy from the harvest. Previously, harvesting has been the right time to marry, but as the tradition fades, cases of pregnancy outside of marriage or selling assets to get married occur more often. This causes an imbalance in society..."

B. The Position of Bissu in Society

Although the Bissu position has diminished under the hegemony of Islam, it is still an important element in society due to several factors. First, Bissu have been healers or Sanro in the Bugis community. In the past, there were several diseases such as *nanre sai* or infectious diseases such as *peddi' babua* or cholera, *cika'* or severe diarrhea, and *sagala* or flu. At the time there were no doctors, therefore the Bissu's position greatly benefited the Bugis community. *Attoriolong* is a belief that disease is present because of god's anger. It is an example of a belief still maintained today.⁵²

Furthermore, treatment administered by Bissu is more inexpensive than treatment by a doctor. If the community does not have money, Sandro has no problem if they receive other compensation such as fruits or rice. Bissu still uses traditional medicine which people believe is more effective, such as water and certain herbs. In contrast, the medicine given by doctors always derives from substances that contain chemicals or must be injected.⁵³ As explained above, Andi Baso Bone (2020) said:

"... sisa dua Bissu monro wettuna Gerakan selleng e nauno para Bissu, wettuna ro, engka acara festival budaya di jumpandang, pemangku adatna Bone natampilkan Bissu iyaro patappulo

⁵¹ "Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, Routledge, London 2001, Ss. IX, 283.," *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* (2016): 266.

⁵² Hakim, "A Long Path of Bissu in South Sulawesi, Indonesia from Glory to Disappearance." (2012): 18.

⁵³ Ibid.





Bissu. Proses diruntu pemeranna Bissu e, pamullana kallolo na ana'dara tapi denaelo nasaba mawaju makkunrai. Dialani calabai di Taman Bungae..."

Translation:

"... There are only two Bissu left when the rebel kills the Bissu. At that time, there was a cultural festival in Makassar; the traditional leaders presented the Bissu as the culture of Bone, namely Bissu 40. The process to get the 40 Bissu was first by selecting young people, but they refused because the costumes did not match their gender, so the traditional leader took the calabai in the Taman Bunga..."

Puritan Muslims eliminated the social position of Bissu through attacks, killings, and discrimination. Thus, the two last Bissu(s) were searching to fill the roles of Bissu in Bone, which consisted of 40 people. In the process, both youth men and women rejected the role because it carried a negative stigma. Therefore, they recruited calabai in Taman Bunga to provide decent work for the *calabai*.

After they accepted the offer, they were guided by the two last Bissu about how to be a Bissu without leaving their professions as *indo' botting* or working in bridal make-up at the beauty salon. They also adopted Bissu activities such as ending certain habits with men and wearing modest clothes. A *calabai* who becomes Bissu goes through a long process and a sacred ritual called *irebba*. *Irebba* welcomes the new Bissu. Even after several long processes, not all *calabai* could become Bissu.⁵⁴

The position of Bissu today is converse to the kingdom. Now, Bissu are sometimes invited to help the Bugis community in carrying out a ritual, for instance, a ritual for new houses, weddings, circumcision, and newborns. Bissu today also performs at the Chinese New Year's

celebration or appears at weddings.⁵⁵ *Magiri* has become an icon of Bissu performance, in which they use sharp objects to stab into parts of the body, such as the neck, eyes, stomach, hand, and other parts of the body to attract tourism.⁵⁶

Bissu today is an artistic and cultural actor. The public continues to engage with Bissu due to the historical roots of the Bissu position in society. The public continues to enjoy the romanticism of the Bissu role.⁵⁷ Today's Bissu have flexible attitudes; if they are following Islamic law, they will adjust to the male character. Conversely, if they are not in an Islamic space, they will draw on behaviors associated with different genders.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Bissu is someone who has a position as an artistic and cultural agent until the date. The social status of Bissu as leaders of the sacred arena is being less respected by the community nowadays due to the dominant influence of Islamic puritanism teachings. The role of Bissu in daily activities has become less involved because it has been replaced by the values of religious puritanism. However, the players still influence the community, because history says that the people of Bone have carried out this tradition for a long time, so the presence of Bissu is still important for the community in carrying out the rituals or traditions that still exist. Equally important, the traditions of local communities will experience degradation due to the intervention of world religions, and ancestral culture began to fade.

This research focuses on the transformation of the perseverance of Bissu in the leadership of traditional rituals in the Bugis Bone Tribe, before and after interacting with Islamic

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Wayan and Rahayu, "Bissu: Ancient Bugis Priest (Perspective on The Influence of Hindu Civilization In Bugis Land)." *Vidyottama Sanatana*. (2020): 243-249.

⁵⁷ Triadi, "Bissu and Toboto Domain; Lanskap, Islam, Dan Negosiasi." (2019): 80.

⁵⁸ Ibid.,





religious values. Thus, the understanding of Islamic teaching had a significant influence on Bissu's position as a religious leader. However, this study only focuses on cases in Bone, so to get a more comprehensive understanding, a comparative analysis is needed from various regions in South Sulawesi regarding the position of Bissu and hegemony of Islamic teaching. In line with these limitations, this paper suggests the need for re-examination by accommodating all the weaknesses of the case under study because today's Bissu needs to receive respect and space like other community members because their existence is a common thread for the continuity of the Bugis Bone tradition. The government needs to educate the history of Bissu as someone who maintains the Bugis tradition and the cultural traditions of Bone to the public and young generation.

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Competing Interests

None of the authors of this study has a financial or personal relationship with other people that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the study.

Author's Contributions

All listed authors contribute to this article. S. and R.A wrote the original draft, conceptualised the study, responsible for the methodology and validation, wrote the formal analysis, and compiled the resources. A. S. R. and H.J. reviewed, and edited the project administration.

Ethical Considerations

This ongoing research report followed all ethical standards for research. This study is field research. In the data collection process

informants feel respect, no bias, and no manipulation.

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Disclaimer

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