

1-1-2020

## Decolonizing Gender Identities in Indonesia: A Study of Bissu 'The Trans-Religious Leader' in Bugis People

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### Recommended Citation

Ismoyo, Petsy J. 2020. Decolonizing Gender Identities in Indonesia: A Study of Bissu 'The Trans-Religious Leader' in Bugis People. *Paradigma: Jurnal Kajian Budaya* 10, no. 3 (January). 10.17510/paradigma.v10i3.404.

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## DECOLONIZING GENDER IDENTITIES IN INDONESIA: A STUDY OF *BISSU* 'THE TRANS-RELIGIOUS LEADER' IN BUGIS PEOPLE

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DOI: 10.17510/paradigma.v10i3.404

### ABSTRACT

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is one of the pillars of Indonesia that has placed our nation and nationness to a diversity of identity, from genders, tribes, religions, to cultures. Indonesia has a long history of gender diversity that recognized various gender identities as part of the culture. Henceforth, In Indonesia, gender is not perceived in a binary way between male or female, masculine and feminine, without giving the 'third space' to other genders and sexuality. For example, Bugis people recognize five genders: *oroané*, *makkunrai*, *calabai*, *calalai*, and *bissu*, which will be examined further in this paper. In reality, a lively debate emerges about "gender pluralism" that is considered not part of Indonesian culture. The rising number of persecution to the minority, including transgender people, has placed them to the most vulnerable groups because of their gender identity. This paper aims to deconstruct the understanding of gender identities in Indonesia through cross-cultural, socio-religious, and postcolonial approaches to develop the cultural history of gender pluralism in Indonesia. To examine further the decolonization of gender identities in Indonesia, the author identifies the process between 'desire' and 'demand' in terms of 'The Colonizers' and 'The Colonized' to see how the 'dominant discourse represents reality about gender identities. By re-imagining 'binary opposition' in the 'on-going' process of movement happens in intercultural space, the author revives the 'intersectional space' of gender identities in Indonesia, as Edward Soja described 'Third Space'. Research result showed that *Bissu*'s existence heretofore left 'the conceived' and 'the Lived' in the Bugis community; thus, it drifted the limited space given to the *Bissu* in 'the perceived'. Consequently, it restricted the development of *Bissu*'s hybrid identity. Henceforth, the revival of *malempu* and *malebbi* were required as an intervention about giving back the power of agency within 'sign games' to the *Bissu*.

### KEYWORDS

*Bissu*; gender pluralism; third space.

### ABSTRAK

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika merupakan salah satu pilar Indonesia yang melandaskan bangsa dan kebangsaan pada keberagaman identitas, khususnya gender, suku, agama, dan secara umum budaya. Identitas gender di Indonesia tidak dapat dipahami hanya lewat konsep biner antara laki-laki dan perempuan, maskulin dan feminin yang tidak memberikan "ruang ketiga" untuk gender dan seksualitas lain. Sebagai contoh, inilah lima gender yang dikenal oleh suku Bugis, yaitu *oroané*, *makkunrai*, *calabai*, *calalai*, dan *bissu* yang telah diteliti. Realitasnya, pluralisme gender didebat sebagai bukan bagian dari kebudayaan Indonesia. Anggapan itu terlihat dari peningkatan persekusi terhadap minoritas, termasuk terhadap kelompok transgender, kelompok paling rentan terhadap diskriminasi karena identitas gender. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendekonstruksi pemahaman tentang identitas gender di Indonesia dengan pendekatan silang budaya, sosio-religius, dan poskolonial. Penulis akan mengidentifikasi proses terjadinya "*desire*" dan "*demand*" dalam kaitannya dengan "The Colonizers" dan "The Colonized" untuk melihat wacana dominan yang merepresentasikan realitas yang berkaitan dengan identitas gender. Dengan menggambarkan ulang oposisi biner sebagai sebuah pergerakan yang terus berproses dalam ruang interkultural, penulis ini mencoba untuk menghidupkan "ruang interseksional" identitas gender di Indonesia yang dijelaskan oleh Edward Soja sebagai "ruang ketiga". Penelitian ini memperlihatkan bahwa Bissu sudah tidak hadir dalam "The Conceived" dan "The Lived" dalam komunitas sehingga menyisakan ruang terbatas bagi Bissu pada ranah "The Perceived". Oleh karena itu, penghidupan kembali nilai *malempu* dan *malebbi* dibutuhkan sebagai intervensi untuk memberi kembali "power" kepada agensi dalam "permainan tanda" di komunitas Bissu.

### KATA KUNCI

Bissu; gender pluralism; third space.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From the vantage point of understanding gender identities in Indonesia, research has been occupied from the point that it is linked to the understanding of 'Western' imperialism and colonialism of two genders: male and female only. Understanding gender pluralism in Indonesia is overshadowed by the worst excesses of colonialism, which remains a powerful remembered history for many of colonized peoples. As it makes Indigenous Peoples (IP) question the validity of their existences, as well as their survival of the languages and forms of cultural knowledge. In the process of conforming the collective memory, knowledge of IP was represented in various ways through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized. Referring to Edward Said, this happened as the result of imaginative construction of ideas and constant interchange of Orient's knowledge in which it is embedded in political discourses, storytelling, and the 'common sense' of a passing narrative of history and the way we respond in such history (Smith 1999, 8–12).

Decolonization is a process that engages with imperialism and colonialism in multiple levers; thus it has to deconstruct the underlying assumptions and values which inform research practices (Smith 1999, 19). To decolonize gender identities, one shall start to deconstruct the familiar perspective of gender as explained in binary opposition of Western understanding. Shall we start with the question of how is religion closely related to colonialism that has much impact on the collective memory in understanding gender identities in Indonesia? And how do religions such as Islam and Christian play a big role in shaping the understanding of

gender identities in Indonesia? Thus, this research aims to look closely at IP's cultural knowledge that must be acknowledged to understand gender identities.

In this paper, the author attempts to look deeper into attorionlong as an ancient Bugis belief system and Bissu as a transvestite religious leader as a concrete example of gender diversity in Indonesia. The myriad combinations of five gender roles in the local religion of Bugis peoples in South Sulawesi will be examined further related to its roles and challenges within society. The five genders known in Bugis people are oroané, makkunrai, calabai, calalai, and Bissu. In doing so, the researcher aims to conceptualize cultural knowledge in understanding gender identities in Indonesia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

Western paradigm utters the ways in which knowledge about indigenous people was collected and classified and represented, thus it is retold back to those who have been colonized, and it becomes a collective memory. Since research is an active space, which means a space of contestation, it is essential to be aware of decolonizing the methodology. Indigenous researches need to represent and retell their story in social sciences. As Smith explained, decolonizing the methodologies is shifting the perspective for the 'colonized' to aim a new agenda within the Western research paradigms, as it enriches the indigenous research. To understand indigenous perspectives ethical codes of conduct serve partly the same aims as the relationship with other human beings and environment. Smith stated an agenda for indigenous research is an attempt to preserve indigenous knowledge. It is important to underscore that being indigenous sets out fairly basic guidelines aimed at respect for protection the rights, interests, and sensitivities of the people being studied. Researcher must understand the code of conducts in cultural terms because understanding indigenous philosophy, principles, its validity and legitimacy of indigenous values attached to their effort and struggle for autonomy – in other words, it is essentially their effort of being indigenous. Furthermore, Smith cited *Kaupapa Maori* practice as her research guidelines namely, *Aroha ki te tangata* (a respect for people), *Kanohi kitea* (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face), *Titiro, whakarongo ... korero* (look, listen ... speak), *Manaaki ki te tangata* (share and host people, be generous), *Kia tupato* (be cautious), *Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata* (do not trample over the mana of people), *Kaua e mahaki* (don't flaunt your knowledge (1999, 107–117).

Therefore this research is trying to underscore the significance of the relationship between human being and humanity as it is rooted in respect for differences. As mentioned in the introduction, this research seeks to explain how to indigenize 'gender discourse' in Indonesia and aims to revitalize the 'intersectional space' of gender identities in Indonesia – as it becomes a shared knowledge about ongoing dialogue and collective interaction. Henceforth, this research uses qualitative descriptive research with a case study. According to Yin, a case study is focused on examining a small group of participants or a group as a whole – it is placed the author within investigation, phenomenon, and context. It is a descriptive type of case study that is used to describe a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. The descriptive phenomenon means that the result of the case study is the narrative, wherewith the interaction within context is analysed. Thereupon, the author attempts to develop a systematic inquiry about various gender identities in Indonesia, which aims to examine gender pluralism in Indonesia, particularly about Bugis peoples in South Sulawesi. It develops the counter-narrative known for the manifold of five genders to comply with four principles as Smith argued to decolonizing methodology (1999, 1–15).

Nevertheless, this study underscores the detailed contextual analysis of gender pluralism in Bugis people, and focuses on the *Bissu* within the context. This study is preliminary research using inquiry data collection through documentation process. The author collects the data from primary and secondary sources

such as, books, academic journals, research reports, and internet sources. In this study, the author obtains data documentation from relevant research according to the purpose of the study, then analysing the data and interpreting it through the decolonized perspective to achieve a narrative of 'gender pluralism' in Indonesia. Then, the author draws the conclusion accordingly (Yin 2003, 97–98).

### 3. POSTCOLONIALISM: AN ATTEMPT TO DECONSTRUCT 'A KNOWLEDGE'

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

(Audre Lorde)

The emergence of postcolonialism started in the decline of the modern western colonial empires such as Britain and France in the 20th century as followed by the birth of postcolonial thinkers, for instance, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Albert Memmi, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Postcolonialism discusses the intercultural power imbalances and such, in which the colonizers forced identity upon the colonized. As many indigenous communities have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of decolonization and social justice, they appraise on the context in which a new form of colonization still has to be articulated, to address that something is at stake and occurs in a set social, political, and cultural conditions (Rajan 1998, 490–492).

This paper examines further through Homi Bhabha's thoughts in *The Location of Culture*, in which he discusses postcolonial discourse that lies on identity. Bhabha emphasized from 'Colonial Ambivalence', to 'Colonial Enunciation' that ends with 'Hybridity' in an identity. His thesis occurred in between 'the colonized' and 'the colonizers' on the discourse of 'mimicry and the liminality as the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, "as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" as a postcolonial identity. It produces the ambivalence presence that leads to the enunciation, in which transformation oversees the 'partial' and 'incomplete of a 'colonized' identity in which mimicry can be seen as 'a resemblance' and 'a menace' to the 'colonized' (2004, 85).

Moreover, to identify the colonizers and the colonized, the identification process is mandatory. This is intended to distinguish that the colonizers have the authority or power to decide the dominant discourse to represent reality. Bhabha used Lacan's theory to explain the colonial subject, referring to the colonizers; that is divided into two categories: desire and demand. In 'desire', as it ends to the 'symbolic' subject or more known as how one identifies oneself to place or be placed in society, nothing separates between those two as they symbolically recognize itself (2004, 85–86). As further explains in this context, that is how *Bissu* in Bugis people identifies themselves. It continues on the Power of Agency and Sign Game as in demand. The sign game evolves between stereotypes and persona in which the 'meaning' frequently slipped because there is the partiality in the power of agency. Bhabha splits it into two, firstly, the mechanism of condensation meaning or metaphor that is used as a stereotype, in this context, Bugis people called *Bissu* 'Banci Salon'. Secondly, there is a shift in spiritual meaning of the word *Bissu* because of their gender – it causes the displacement of *Bissu* as one who has highest spiritual position in Bugis people, to the one who has deviant behaviour according knowledge of binary opposition regarding gender identities. Things that must be understood is that the stereotyping, diverting, and displacement of identity is merely repeated acts to stabilize the identity within the uncertainty and instability of binary oppositions.

Thus, Bhabha offers a deconstruction of the understanding of 'in-between' and 'within' further known as 'Liminality'. The opposition between 'the colonizers' and 'the colonized' is not as clear-cut as it is made out

to be. We ought to understand that liminality opens up the hybridity in which identity and alterity embedded. The colonized not only imitates the colonizers (mimicry) but also causes uncertainty and anxiety to the colonizers. In today's context, the identity of Bissu is cleaved between their indigenous beliefs and the scattered knowledge of gender binary which is oftenly rooted in religious teachings. In consequence, it destabilize the essential binarism of gender identities. Nevertheless, it can be double edged sword in matter of the struggle for gender diversity in Indonesia in the meaning of the existence of *Bissu* can be evidence of gender diversity, however, seeing the increasing number of discrimination against gender minority in Indonesia – *Bissu's* position is regarded as vulnerable. Still and all, what will be focused in this paper is to look carefully the shift of *Bissu's* narrative contestation in which it shows the *liminality of Bissu* – regarding their attempts to *mimicry* arises ambivalence identity within society. It unveils 'in-between' space for Bissu to survive. In short, their identity can be seen as 'Banci Salon', but not quite *Bissu*.

Furthermore, referring to the liminal identity of *Bissu*, Bhabha's Theory of Liminality stated the space where cultural change can take place, in which intercultural space where personal and communal self-reliance strategies can be elaborated. It highlights an area where there is a never-ending 'on-going process' of movement and exchange between different identities. This leaves space to the colonizers and the colonized to the transit moments and crossings, creating alienation, or liminal space. In this matter, alienation means a mode of resistance to liberate from the dominant culture. In short, the most important part is that Bhabha prompts reviving intersectional space to reimagine the binary opposition (2004, 87–88). In addition to that, the author will use the Trialectics of Spatiality from Soja (1996) to easily depict the spatiality of *Bissu* in Bugis people to explain what Bhabha called 'Reimagining binary opposition as a way to revive intersectional space and the 'in-betweens'. By explaining the symbolic interaction that depicts the involvement, contestation, and adjustment in the 'Third Space' – Soja explained how the 'lived', 'perceived', and the conceived' become the creation of liminal space that happens to be decolonizing the gender identities. Thus, the following explanation divides into three parts: attoriolong as 'The Conceived', *Bissu* as 'The Lived', and the history as 'The Perceived'.

### 3.1 Local Religion 'Attoriolong' as 'The Conceived'

To understand the multifacet of gender identities as an attempt to decolonize, it is important to know the local religion, known as attoriolong, and how it has been conceived in the spatiality. *Attoriolong* is the original religion brought about by the migration wave of the Protomelayu (Toala and Tokea) ethnic groups, then mixed with the beliefs of the Deutromelayu tribe (Nyompa 1992, 33 in Pabbajah 2012, 398). The tradition of transvestites had existed in the ancient Bugis oral tradition, written in the classic Bugis I La Galigo script. *Bissu* is the leader of the pre-Islamic ancient Bugis religion. Quoting Pabbajah, the Bugis tribe embraced attoriolong as their religion before Islam entered South Sulawesi. Starting from the Luwu area, the *Bissu* tradition spread in several areas such as Luwu, Bone, Wajo, Soppeng, Pangkep, Pinrang, Sidrap, Makassar City, and Pare-Pare. Based on the narration in surek Galigo, Lae Lae is the first Bissu descended from the sky along with Raja Luwu, Batara Guru, the son of the Great Maharaja in Kayangan (Lathief 2004, 2).

Religious institutions of attoriolong can be seen from the Earthly Life (*Attuwong Lino*), the Afterlife (*Esso Ri Munri or Pammasareng*), Gods (*Dewatae*), and Offerings (*Massompa*). Bugis peoples believe that the birth of a human being is blessed with life and the spirit (*Sumangek/Sungek*), which must be maintained in the human body. Bugis peoples believe in life after death; thus, the existence of a virtual world or a world that cannot be reached by human senses is called Pammasareng. In that matter, the virtual world is filled with power and supernatural beings (Spirits/*Tau Tenrita* or Ancestors/*Tau Riolo*). In the living world, it is

compulsory to ask for help from Pammansareng for the welfare of life in the Real World (*Linoe*). Furthermore, in giving offerings (*Massompa*), the Bugis peoples believe in that is made by several figures in the *Attoriolong* religious institution, namely, *To Makita-kita* (Astrologer), *Panati* (Ceremony Officer), *Sanro* (Shaman), and *Anreguru* (master) (Lathief 2004, 8–12).

Furthermore, according to the 'Conceived', the belief of Bugis peoples prompts the followers to believe in a single deity, called *PattoE* (He Determines the Fate), also called the *God of SeuWaE* (God Almighty) or *Turie A'ra'na* (Who Has the Absolute Will) (Pabbajah 2012, 400). Bugis people's belief is based on *Massoma* (worship) and *Makkasiwiyang* (serving). These two things should be done to achieve the light of mind (*Pabbirita* or *Pammase*) so that humans can become whole (*Tau Tongeng-tongeng*), or even become transcendent (*Tau Bettu*). The important thing in religious system of Bugis people, according to Pabbajah, their attitude towards *The Divine* or *The Supernatural* is derived from the experience of living with joyful and sorrow which begins with a magical feeling that shrouds human beings and all aspects of life – thus, they feel *The Divinity* (*Keilahian*) is difficult to express whether it is enchanting or terrifying statement. Therefore, *The Divinity* manifests in the self of a king of god and gods (*Raja, Dewa, Dewaraja*) (Pabbajah 2012, 401).

In the religious system and the teachings of the cosmos, how the 'Conceived' appears can be seen from Bugis customs, which refers to two important values: *Malebbi* (glory) and *Malempu* (honesty) (Hamka 2015, 50). *Massompa* or ritual worship is carried out in honour of gods with different names. In Bugis religious system, there are three Gods namely, *Massompa Dewata LangiE* (Heavenly Gods), *Dewata Mallinoe* (Earthly God), *Dewata TanaE* (Land Gods), *Deata UwaE* (Gods of Water). As an expression of gratitude, Bugis people conveys it through rituals. If Bugis people gives offerings to *Massompa Dewata LangiE* to be thankful for, they do ritual called *Mappaenrek*; aside from that, *Mappangolo* is the offerings for *Dewata Mallinoe* to be thankful for rice yields; *Massompa Massorong* is the offerings for *Dewata Tanae*, and *Massompa Mappanok* as the offerings that goes down to *Dewata UwaE*. Meanwhile, to the supreme deity, *PatotoE* is called *makkasuwiyang* (devotion of self). In addition to that, other *Massompa* worship rituals are *Yaiyu*, *Tulakbala*, *Massorong*, *Mappaenre*, *Mattoana*, *Millau Bosi*, *Mattedduk Arajang*, *Mappedaung Arajang*, *Manre Sipulung*, *Maddoja Bine*, *Mappalili*, and *Mappalettuk* (Pabbajah 2012, 403–406).

### 3.2 *Bissu*: 'The Lived' of the Gender Liminality

To further comprehend the trialectics of spatiality, we need to understand the 'Lived' of 'the *Bissu*' as one example of gender liminality in Indonesia's culture. The comprehensive understanding both of the 'Conceived' and 'Lived' will lead us to the apprehension of gender identities that breaks the 'common knowledge' of dichotomous gender identities. In this part, the author explains more about the 'knowledge' that comes from the 'Conceived'.

In Bugis people, *Bissu* comes from the word 'bessi', which means clean; in a sense, not bleeding, holy, not menstruating, and not breastfeeding (Ad'ham 2009, 403 in Suliyati 2018, 56). Besides that, *Bissu* may not have sexual relations and be able to control their sexual desires. *Bissu* must also show the quality of other asceticism, such as not drinking tea or coffee; or not eating sweets (Davies 2018a, 323). Pelras stated that the *Bissu* word may originate from the word *Bhiksu* (leader of Buddhism), developed before the pre-Islamic period. It can be seen from the similar functions found in *Bhiksu* and *Bissu* (Pelras 2006, 68).

The presence of *Bissu* is inseparable from the myths of the people in South Sulawesi, which are conveyed through oral and writing traditions. In the writing tradition, *I La Galigo* consists of 6,000 pages and 300,000 lines, written in the 13th to the 15th century, which contains religious system, the teachings of the cosmos, customs, social institutions, the growth of the kingdom, the economic system, geographical

conditions and important events that occurred. | La Galigo is the longest epic book in the world. Pelras wrote in his book, *The Bugis*,: “The Bugis know their past through two types of anonymous manuscripts referred to as myths/epics and historical/chronic texts. The first type of literary work contains poetic stories, called Surek Galigo by a Bugis, and it is according to the name of one of the main characters of the story, which is La Galigo” (2006, 33).

This Bugis *lontara* script is presented in Barazanji (a tradition of ritual gratitude carried out by Bugis people). The contents are conversations between *Datu Patotoq and Datu Palingeq* (the two ruling gods of the heavens) and *Guru ri Selleng and Sinoa Toja* (the two ruling gods of the underworld) who decided to fill *Lino* (Middle World or Earth) by lowering the *Batara Guru* and bringing up *Nyiliq Timoq* (Empress) to become the first King of the Luwuq kingdom, accompanied by a *Bissu* named *Lae-lae*. The *Bissu* is the one who helps *Batara Guru* to regulate life in *Lino*, from norms, ethics, and other rules in society. In addition to that, *Bissu* also helps create works and traditions from communication with the community (Kern 1993, 34 in Suliyati 2018, 52–53). The emergence of La Galigo, the son of *Sawerigading* and *Opunna Ware*, in the 14th century was also crowned as the *Pajung Lolo* (young King) in the kingdom of Luwu. *Batara Guru* was then replaced by *Batara Lattu'* (La Tiuleng); and was blessed with twins, *La Ma'dukelleng* or *Lawe* or *Sawerigading* (Putera Ware') and a daughter named *We Tenriyabeng*. *Sawerigading* wanted to marry *We Tenriyabeng* because he did not know that they were related. Then, *Sawerigading* left Luwu, went to China, and married *We Cudai*.

In contrast to common Indonesian culture (binary opposition of gender that later explains in the next part), both in religion and gender, classical Bugis religion recognizes five types of gender, which are *oroané* (male), *makkunrai* (female), *calalai* (masculine female), *calabai* (feminine male) and *Bissu* (androgini or intersex who become religious leaders), in their social institutions. A *calabai* or *calalai* may become a *Bissu*. However, there are more *calabai* than *calalai* who became *Bissu*. There are three levels in *calabai*, which are *calabai tungke'na lino* (*calabai* who has the highest degree), *paccalabai* (*calabai gol bali-balla'*; which can relate to men and women), and *calabai kedo-kedonami* (*calabai* lowest group; only the style and clothes are *calabai*-styled; but they are physically genuine men); only those who have been in the *calabai tungke'na lino* group can call themselves *Bissu*. A *calabai* must receive blessings from the Gods to arrive at that level (Lathief 2004, 44).

A *calabai* must receive the blessing of *Puang Matowa* and *Puang Lolo*, then swear to obey all the *pangaderreng* (traditions and customs) to become a *Bissu*. In the process, a *calabai* must get a 'spiritual call', after which *Puang Lolo* will provide guidance and live in *Arajang's* house to learn the *maBissu* etiquette (Lathief 2004, 45–46). There are 40 *Bissu* in Bone. It is believed that 40 is considered a perfect number, as mentioned in one of the *Bissu* (*sessukeng*) singing stanzas, so it is also called the *Bissu patappuloe*. Thereof, six processes must be passed. These processes are: (1) *calabai/calalai* must undergo the '*mutih*' fast, where they only eat white rice without side dishes and water for 7 (seven) days or fast for 40 days at the *bola arajang* (house for storing relics); (2) *Mattinja'* (vows) and must write and pronounce the *Sureq Galigo* smoothly, the ancient *Bugis Rajah* alphabets can be a tool to carry out their duties and work; (3) The *Bissu* candidates are then laid in the *bola arajang* attic for 3 or 7 days in the *irebba* process; (4) The last day, the *Bissu* candidate is bathed, shrouded and laid down for a day from morning to dusk, on top of his body a water-filled jar which has been purified (*mabessi*) during the *sakkatolo* (agreed) ceremony is hung, during this process, *Sureq Galigo* is sung to the prospective *Bissu*; (5) At dusk, the jar is broken by *Puang Matowa* until the body of the prospective *Bissu* is wet at *irebba*; (6) The *Bissu* candidates is officially a *Bissu* if they have passed this process (Suliyati 2018, 55–56).

*Bissu* is divided into three based on the hierarchy: *Puang Matowa*, *Puang Lolo*, and *Ana'Bissu*. A *Puang Matowa* must come from *Puang Lolo*. He is the head of the *Bissu*, who are appointed by the king.



*Puang Lolo* (young master) is considered as a representative or confidant of *Puang Matowa*. *Puang Lolo* inherits all knowledge from *Puang Matowa*. There are also *Bissu pantundang* who cannot dance, but are ritual experts; and *Bissu makkunrai* (female Bissu) who is also included in the *Bissu patappuloe*. There is also a person called *panati*, who helps *Puang Matowa* to care for the *Arajang*; and *Jennang* who manages the *bola Arajang*. There is also the name of *Bissu Mama* or *Bissu* who has not been appointed through the *irreba*. Finally, *Ana'Bissu* is the assistant of *Puang Matowa* and *Puang Lolo*. *Ana'Bissu* is divided into two, *Bissu tanre* and *Bissu poncok*. There are 40 *Bissu tanre*, and they are the highest level of *Bissu* who appeared only at the ceremony of going down to the rice fields (*mappalili*); if they are a *shaman* (*Sanro*), they are given a title for the name *maujangka* before becoming *Bissu Mama* and then *Ana'Bissu*. Second, *Bissu poncok* or low-level *Bissu*, also called *core-core*, descends on royal parties and ceremonies in the field (Lathief 2004, 48–51).

### 3.3 Retelling the History as 'The Perceived' of Spatiality

The most crucial point in 'The Perceived' is to understand that the liminality requires us to know the history and retell it. As gender identities are constantly changing, it is notable to breakdown the 'Perceived' as the fact that the representation of the *Bissu* shows the diversity of religion and gender in Indonesia at the same time. Furthermore, the 'Perceived' must begin with the comprehension that the tradition of the transvestite religious leader held by the Bugis shows the complexity of the distribution of power within the community regarding religion and gender. From that point on, the 'Perceived' of decolonizing gender identities lies in understanding gender diversity, which is inherent in Indonesian culture. The traces of the colonizers that justifies the dichotomous gender identities can be seen in the writings of Antonio de Paiva, a merchant and missionary from Portugal, who visited South Sulawesi in the 1540s. In his letter, de Paiva wrote about "his disgust" towards the *Bissu* on the practice of homosexuality that he saw. This is because de Paiva had an Orthodox Christian background (Pelras 1996, 35 in Davies 2018b, 7). Thus the quote from de Paiva's letter:

Your Lordship will know that the priests of these kings are generally called Bissu. They grow no hair on their beards, dress in a womanly fashion, and grow their hair long and braided; they imitate [women's] speech because they adopt all of the female gestures and inclinations. They marry and are received, according to the custom of the land, with other common men, and they live indoors, uniting carnally in their secret places with the men whom they have for husbands. This is public [knowledge], and not just around here, but on account of the same mouths which Our Lord has given to proclaim his praise. These priests, if they touch a woman in thought or deed, are boiled in tar because they hold that all their religion would be lost if they did it; and they have their teeth covered in gold. And as I say to Your Lordship, I went with this very sober thought, amazed [that] Our Lord would destroy those three cities of Sodom for the same sin and considering how a destruction had not come over such a wanton people as these in such a long time and what was there to do, for the whole land was encircled by.

Besides de Paiva, James Brooke, who is from England, also wrote in a note of his trip to South Sulawesi regarding gender diversity in Indonesia (1848, 82–83 in Davies 2018b, 9) as written below.

The strangest custom I have observed is, that some men dress like women, and some women like men; not occasionally, but all their lives, devoting themselves to the occupations and pursuits of their adopted sex. In the case of the males, it seems that the parents of a boy, upon perceiving in him certain effeminacies of habit and appearance, are induced thereby to present him to one of the rajahs, by whom he is received. These youths often acquire much influence over their masters.

Besides the fact that Christianity came to South Sulawesi and judged the 'local values' as deviant, these two travel records show that the existence of *Bissu* in the Bugis religion and culture had existed since the 1500s. Thus, it proves the hybridity of the 'Conceived' and the 'Lived' is complex, to understand the 'Perceived'. To understand more about the 'Perceived', it is necessary to examine the relationship between religion and gender, deeply at the power distribution. As written in Morny Joy's *Gender & Religion: A Volatile Mixture*, religion and gender are in the system of power represented in society, and it forms the structural relations which can be seen from symbolic and material practices. Therefore, we can depict the 'Perceived' from the ritual, social, and cosmology of religion or belief as explained in the 'Lived' and 'Conceived' (2006, 22–23).

In the 'Perceived', it will be explained about the complex situation concerning the existence of *Bissu*, which is in a vulnerable position as a minority group. This occurs due to the three main factors described as follows: (1) The shift of gender pluralism into gender binarism due to Islam's entry and development in South Sulawesi. This momentum has occurred since the 17th century, but it is evident in the deep Islamization of Operation Toba conducted in 1966; (2) There is a shift of 'power' in society as seen from Bugis people's social institutions. This is marked by a decline in the rituals carried out by the *Bissu*. So, there is a lack of work for *Bissu*. *Bissu* only relies on income from working in salons, bridal makeup, and invitations to perform custom events. *Bissu* no longer resides in Arajang; (3) In addition to the position shift of the *Bissu* in social institutions, the absence of *Bissu*'s regeneration also caused a leadership crisis, especially since the death of Puang Matowa Saidi in 2011 (Lathief 2004, 79).

As history has been told, the Islamization of Bugis has actually occurred since the 17th century, during the Gowa and Tallo kingdom period. In Bugis, Islamization happened thoroughly because it was a top-down trait from the kingdom and then to the people. King Tallo VI, who is called I Mallikang Daeng Nyonri Karaeng Katangka, converted to Islam in 1605. King Tallo was also given an Arabic title: Sultan Abdullah Awwalul Islam. After that, Raha Gowa XIV named I Mangarangi Daeng Manrabia received the Arabic name of Sultan Awaluddin. Two years later, all the people of Gowa and Tallo embraced Islam (Patunru, 1967 in Pabbajah 2012, 407). Furthermore, Operation Toba (Operation Taubat) was initiated by Kahar Muzakar (DI/TII) in 1966, targeting the *Bissu* community. They were considered inappropriate with Islamic teachings because of homosexuality and rituals that are considered 'heretical'. This movement forced the *Sanros* and *Bissu* to become 'men'; those who refused were killed in Operation Toba. All ceremonial equipment was burned and sunk to the sea. It did not stop there, during the New Order, in 1965, the *Bissu* and *sanros* would be associated with PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) because they were considered 'envious' by adhering to animist teachings. This was forbidden because it means that deifying *arajang* is to betray God. Since Operation Toba, the *mappalili* ceremony was no longer held on a large scale; the *Bissu* hid from the threat of death, people did not dare defend their traditions for fear of being killed (quoted from an interview with Mr. Angkong Petta Rala, July 26, 1999, in Lathief 2004, 80–81).

Because of Islamization, the active movement between the trialectics of spatiality also gave birth to the crucial position as *Bissu* had lost their position in the community institution. This happened because of the discipline of thought by the new 'mythologies' that were strong and supported by the state and religious leaders, which declined the role of *Bissu*. Since 1600, there has been a shift from gender cosmology that contains masculine and feminine principles, replaced with a new masculine gender (found in Islam and Christianity); This caused the ritual of transvestism to be absurd (Davies 2018a, 332–333). For example, in 1966, the *Mappalili* ceremony was again carried out because the harvest was unsatisfactory, the community no longer saw the *Bissu* as a 'holy person'. The presence of traditional ceremonies is only for embellishment. Abdul Aziz stated this on December 22, 1996: "They have already been apriori with *mappalili* traditional

ceremonies, because they are not in accordance with Islamic teachings. They don't want to come to *Bola Arajang* anymore" (Lathief 2004, 82). Even until today, Islamic scholars consider the practice carried out by *Bissu* is 'disgraceful' and 'damned' (Davies 2018a, 351).

The shift in social institutions, according to Lathief, is caused by two things, namely, the fading of traditional institutions and the role of government in society. This is related to customary land tenure. Since the last *Puang Matowa* died, customary land ownership belongs to the government based on Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution and the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) concerning land rights. Based on Lathief's interview with Mr Zainuddin in June 1999, the opposition figure former sub-district coordinator of the United Development Party (PPP) said that the *Puang Longi* heritage fields in Segeri partially belonged to the local government, some of which were not clear who the owners were. The shift in government regulations has replaced the traditional system ran by Bugis tribes. The system shifts the value of *malebbi* (glory) and *malempu* (honesty) into written regulations with the power of law in society. This affected the vulnerability of the existence of *Bissu* because there was no fixed source of funds to finance the ceremonies and daily lives of the *Bissu*, who lived in *Bola Arajang*. Therefore, *Bissu* must go out and look for other livelihoods to live their daily lives, apart from self-help assistance and increasingly reduced government assistance (2004, 85). That is why they are working in Salon, and thus the stereotypes begin to embedded in them as 'Banci Salon'. It is not because they want to, but they have a limited access to choose other occupations.

In Davies' interview with *Bissu* Mariani, he stated: "Now there is no king, *Bissu* must look for ways to stay alive, such as being a shaman (traditional medicine practitioner), or becoming a cultural expert (traditional figure) or working in beauty salons, or selling sarongs, or service vendors as party organizers -wedding party [...] In the past, anyone who became the *Puang Matowa* received one hectare of land, given by the King. Now, the government is establishing a cultural office and school on the land that is given to *Bissu*. Now there is no more gathering place for *Bissu*" (2018a, 334–335).

Another factor that affected the trialectics of spatiality is the absence of *Bissu's* regeneration in the Bugis tradition, according to Lathief, is because of the syncretism in which Islam blends with the Bugis culture. Thus, in between the hybridity identity of the *Bissu*, the liminality becomes finite; there is no location of culture that can give the power of agency to the *Bissu*. In this matter, as we can see, Islam that is present in a *Bissu* ritual is considered more as a stream of occult rather than dogma. Thus the position of *Bissu* and *Attoriolong* is not regarded as 'religion', but only as a mere "practice'. Lathief described *Sanro Barlian* as *Puang Matowa Bissu Segeri* as the last to carry out the Hajj as an adaptation effort so that his charisma and position as a traditional leader is still 'respected' in the community. However, in 1968, *Sanro Balian* actually left *Bola Arajang* and moved to his house. Recorded since 2000, *Bissu* have survived as a bridal ceremony organizer (*Indo botting*) and concurrently as shamans (*Sanro*). The last ceremony was carried out by Haji Nawir which involved *Bissu* dressed in white with a head-covering similar to Hajj (even *Puang Matowa Saidi* who acted as Commander/leader also wore all-white clothes) (2004, 92–93).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The hybridity of *Bissu* shows the negotiation of the culture in which there is a condition that perpetuates the practice of cultural change. What is happening in the trialectics of spatiality is a proof that the indication of hybridity confirms the trace of ambivalences of gender identities. It has shown that there is no longer 'the Conceived' and 'the Lived' left in the society, so it forsakes the limited space given to the *Bissu* in the 'Perceived', so it restricts the development of *Bissu's* hybrid identity. It shows again the importance of

interventions to increase public awareness of gender and religious pluralism; so, it will give back the power of agency within sign games to the *Bissu*.

It can be done by introducing the *Bissu* community in education. This can be started by redistributing the development of the values of *malebbi* (glory) and *malempu* (honesty) in Indonesian society in general. This can be used as a counter-narrative of how deviant '*Bissu*' has been widely echoed for past decades. The counterculture's position is getting stronger, considering that the reference is the epic book of *I La Galigo* which is the longest book in the history of the archipelago (Indonesia). With more introduction about the customs and traditions of the *Bissu*, it is hoped that the redistribution of power can be implemented as a solution of the three points described by the author in the last section, among others: decolonize the understanding of dichotomous gender identity by understanding of local religion pluralism in Indonesia which also shows gender pluralism. So, we have to apprehend the hybridity of *Bissu* as the return to a real example of diverse Indonesian culture.

Likewise, to overcome the lack of jobs and regeneration of *Bissu* and leadership crises that occurred, with a re-understanding of *malebbi* and *malempu*, it is expected that the regional government, customary institutions and civil society organizations can intervene, to support unequal social institutions due to shifts caused by the first points. I also target the key role of both Islamic and Christian religious institutions to be the catalyst for gender diversity education centered on *I La Galigo* and the value of *malebbi* and *malempu* as the central 'sacred power' or the cultural values of the Bugis people.

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