CrossMark

Negotiating Ritual Authority and Non-Binary Leadership: The Bissu of Bugis Society in Contemporary Religious and Cultural Landscapes

Mahyuddin Mahyuddin[1], Sitti Aminah[2], A. Nurkidam[3] Abdul Jalil[4]

[1]   Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia; Email: mahyuddin@iainpare.ac.id
[2]   Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia; Email: staminah@iainpare.ac.id
[3]   Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia; Email: anurkidam@iainpare.ac.id
[4]   Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam DDI Pangkep, Indonesia; Email: abduljalil.aj62@gmail.com
＊   Corresponding author

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine how the Bissu, as non-binary ritual leaders in Bugis society, sustain their identity and ritual authority amid shifting religious, cultural, and political landscapes. **Method**: The research adopts a qualitative approach using a phenomenological orientation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Bissu practitioners, community members, and government representatives, complemented by participant observation of rituals and cultural performances in Segeri, Pangkajene and Kepulauan (Pangkep), South Sulawesi. Data analysis was conducted through thematic and narrative techniques to identify recurring patterns related to lived experiences, adaptation strategies, and transformations of ritual authority. **Findings**: The findings reveal three main patterns. First, the Bissu experience a weakening of social recognition accompanied by stigma and economic vulnerability, despite their continued visibility in cultural events. Second, they actively employ religious and cultural adaptation strategies, integrating Islamic practices such as prayer, Barzanji recitation, and pilgrimage alongside traditional rituals. Third, Bissu ritual authority is being redefined from sacred, community-based leadership toward more symbolic and institutionally mediated roles, particularly through government-sponsored cultural and heritage programmes. **Implications** These findings contribute to debates on non-binary indigenous leadership by demonstrating that ritual authority is shaped not only by cosmology but also by institutional and political arenas where recognition is negotiated. Practically, the study suggests that cultural and local government policies should move beyond event-based recognition toward more sustainable support that enables the Bissu to maintain ritual roles within their communities. **Originality**: This study offers an original, voice-driven account grounded in Bissu narratives and direct observation, moving beyond symbolic or historical analyses. It introduces a two-level model of adaptation and conceptualises ritual authority as a dynamic process of contemporary negotiation rather than a fixed traditional status.

Keywords: Bissu; Bugis society; cultural authority; non-binary ritual leadership; religious adaptation.

Introduction

In recent years, the social position of the Bissu or sacred non-binary ritual leaders in Bugis society, has become increasingly precarious. Reports from Tempo (2023) describe how the number of Bissu in Bone has drastically declined from approximately forty practitioners in previous decades to only ten remaining disciples under the guidance of Puang Matoa Ancu. This decline is exacerbated by official prohibitions, notably the repeated ban by the Governor of South Sulawesi and the Regent of Bone on Bissu participation in the annual *Hari Jadi Bone* (Bone Anniversary) celebrations. Many Bissu, including Puang Matoa Ancu, recount feelings of "ostracism" and "deep

discouragement," revealing how institutional exclusion reinforces societal stigma. The diminishing interest among younger generations further accelerates the erosion of Bissu presence. These developments mark a critical cultural rupture, given that Bissu historically managed royal rice fields, safeguarded heirlooms, and led enthronement rituals in Bugis kingdoms. Their current marginalisation thus signals not only the weakening of an important indigenous spiritual institution but also the potential loss of a key component of Bugis identity and cultural continuity.

The vulnerability of the Bissu today is deeply rooted in historical and contemporary patterns of religious purification and gender-based discrimination. Tempo (2023) and National Geographic Indonesia (2022) both document how the legacy of Operation Toba in the 1950s–1960s, when Bissu were hunted, coerced into abandoning their identity, or executed, continues to shape public attitudes, contributing to ongoing exclusion. Moreover, New Naratif (2022) highlights how many conservative groups label Bissu as *musyrik* (idolaters or those considered to commit polytheistic deviation) or equate them with modern LGBTQ+ categories, thereby collapsing their ancestral spiritual functions into stigmatized identities. National data from the Community Legal Aid Institute records 973 incidents of discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender expression in 2017, indicating a broader hostile climate that disproportionately affects gender-diverse communities, including the Bissu. These socio-religious pressures have contributed to the decline or transformation of key rituals such as *mappalili*, *massimang*, and *mattompang arajang*, which increasingly appear as cultural spectacles detached from their sacred cosmological context. The convergence of historical persecution, contemporary religious puritanism, and generational disengagement renders Bissu survival increasingly fragile, underscoring the urgent need for scholarly attention to this cultural endangerment within the broader landscape of indigenous ritual leadership in Indonesia.

Research on the Bissu has been widely conducted, and based on the review carried out by the author, two major thematic categories can be identified. The first concerns the Bissu as a cosmological gender identity. A substantial body of scholarship positions the Bissu within Bugis metaphysics as a sacred gender category that transcends the binary divisions of male and female. Syamsurijal, Halimatusa'diah, and Jati (2024) describe the Bissu as the "fifth gender," embodying a sacred synthesis of all gender elements and serving as ritual mediators between the human and spiritual realms. Rahmi and Suprihatin (2020) further demonstrate that Bissu identity destabilises modern binary conceptions of gender by foregrounding indigenous notions of androgyny. The performative dimension of this identity is elaborated by Akhmar et al. (2023), who show that ritual enactments such as the *Sere Bissu Maggiriq* not only reaffirm the Bissu's liminal gendered presence but also function as mechanisms of social recognition within Bugis society. Comparative studies of global indigenous gender systems reinforce these insights: House (2016) identifies analogous cosmological roles among Navajo two-spirit individuals, while Sidime (2024) and Robinson (2020) illustrate how nonbinary spiritual figures in African and Native American traditions challenge colonial and modern binary frameworks. Collectively, these studies affirm that Bissu identity is not simply a sociocultural designation but a cosmological construct that positions them as custodians of sacred knowledge within the Bugis worldview.

A second cluster of studies examines the decline of Bissu authority as a consequence of Islamization and state-driven political transformations in South Sulawesi. Scholars of Islamization, such as Amir et al. (2024), Nasihin et al. (2024), and Hasaruddin et al. (2018), explain how the institutionalisation of Islam beginning in the seventeenth century reshaped the socio-religious landscape by integrating *sara'* (Islamic law) into

pangngadereng (customary law), thereby reducing the legitimacy of pre-Islamic ritual specialists such as the Bissu. This diminishing authority intensified in the mid-twentieth century, as documented by Wildan et al. (2024), who illustrate how DI/TII propaganda portrayed Bissu practices as heretical, leading to persecution, coercive "purification," and the erosion of their ritual functions. In the post-New Order period, political contestations around Islamic identity further complicated Bissu survival; Robinson (2011) notes how sharia-based local regulations empowered puritanical groups that marginalised indigenous ritual actors. Yet, other scholars show that the Bissu negotiated these pressures through cultural adaptation: Azis (2023) demonstrates that acculturation with Islamic values enabled some preservation of Bissu traditions, though their spiritual authority remained substantially weakened within a patriarchal and Islamised social structure. Taken together, this body of research shows that Islamization, reinforced by state politics and local religious regulation, has played a decisive role in diminishing Bissu authority and repositioning their ritual identity within the margins of contemporary Bugis society.

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, both thematic clusters reveal a significant gap concerning the experiential, voice-driven dimensions of Bissu identity and authority. Studies on cosmological gender identity primarily focus on symbolic meanings, metaphysical classifications, and ritual performances, yet they seldom foreground how the Bissu themselves articulate their lived realities, negotiate gendered subjectivities, or interpret their spiritual roles within rapidly changing socio-religious environments. Likewise, research on Islamization and state politics has extensively examined external pressures but offers limited insight into how the Bissu internally respond to these forces, adapt their ritual practices, or reconstruct their authority within contemporary Bugis society. Moreover, few studies employ phenomenological or narrative approaches capable of capturing the subjective experiences, emotional landscapes, and interpretive frameworks through which Bissu understand their own survival and transformation. This absence of a voice-centred, experience-driven analysis leaves a substantial conceptual and empirical gap, underscoring the need for research that privileges Bissu perspectives to illuminate the nuanced strategies, meanings, and adaptations that shape their ritual leadership today.

To address these gaps, this study aims to investigate how the Bissu construct, articulate, and negotiate their identities and ritual authority within the contemporary socio-religious landscape of Bugis society. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) amplify the voices of Bissu by exploring their lived experiences as non-binary ritual leaders; (2) examine the strategies they employ to adapt to the pressures of Islamization, state politics, and shifting cultural norms; and (3) analyse how their ritual authority is redefined in response to changing religious, political, and social dynamics. By focusing on the subjective perspectives of the Bissu through a phenomenological lens, this study seeks to generate a more grounded and humanised understanding of their roles, challenges, and cultural resilience, thereby filling the empirical and conceptual gaps left by previous research.

Based on the author's preliminary understanding, the Bissu's persistence amid religious, political, and cultural pressures is best explained through their capacity to continually renegotiate identity and authority within shifting social landscapes. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990, 1993) the author argues that Bissu identity is not a fixed ontological status but a continuously enacted practice, materialised through ritual performance, bodily aesthetics, and symbolic comportment that collectively challenge rigid binary constructions of gender. At the same time, following Clifford Geertz's (2017) interpretive anthropology, the Bissu can be understood

as cultural signifiers who inhabit and reproduce culturally embedded "webs of meaning," thereby maintaining ritual authority by reinterpreting ancestral symbols within contemporary contexts. Together, these theoretical perspectives underpin the study's working hypothesis: that Bissu ritual leadership is sustained not through static adherence to tradition but through dynamic cultural negotiations that integrate indigenous cosmology with dominant Islamic norms and state-defined cultural agendas. Consequently, the author anticipates that Bissu agency is expressed through strategic accommodation, symbolic modification, and selective reinterpretation of ritual practices.

Methods

This study positions the Bissu as its primary unit of analysis, focusing on their ritual practices, social experiences, and identity construction as non-binary spiritual leaders within Bugis society. The analysis centres on how the Bissu embody and negotiate a culturally specific gender category that diverges from conventional binary systems, while simultaneously performing sacred roles that integrate cosmological, social, and symbolic functions. Geographically, the research is situated in Segeri, Pangkajene and Kepulauan (Pangkep), one of the remaining cultural landscapes in South Sulawesi where Bissu traditions continue to be actively reproduced. By delineating the Bissu's ritual activities, socio-religious interactions, and lived experiences, this study provides a focused and contextually grounded examination that directly aligns with the overarching objective of understanding non-binary leadership and cultural adaptation within contemporary Bugis society.

This research employs a qualitative design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of the Bissu as non-binary ritual leaders. A qualitative method is most appropriate for this study because it enables an in-depth examination of meanings, interpretations, and subjective realities that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement. The phenomenological approach, following Moustakas (1994), was intentionally selected to foreground the Bissu's own perspectives, emotions, and embodied understandings of their ritual authority and identity negotiation—dimensions that previous studies have rarely centred. This approach aligns directly with the identified research gap, as it allows the author to investigate how Bissu articulate their spiritual roles, confront socioreligious pressures, and adapt to shifting cultural landscapes. By prioritising experiential narratives and contextual interpretations, the chosen design provides a theoretically grounded and methodologically coherent framework for addressing the aims of the study.

This study draws on both primary and secondary sources of data to capture the multidimensional roles and experiences of the Bissu. Primary data were obtained from six purposively selected informants, consisting of three active Bissu practitioners, one local government representative, one community elder, and one cultural figure, all of whom possess direct relevance to the study's focus on ritual authority, cultural adaptation, and social perception. The use of purposive sampling was intended to ensure that participants held substantive knowledge of Bissu practices and socioreligious dynamics, while also enabling the inclusion of diverse sociocultural perspectives. In addition to interview data, participant observation during key ritual events provided contextual insights into embodied practices and symbolic interactions. Secondary data—such as documentation of ritual tools, traditional attire, cultural symbols, archival materials, and relevant academic literature—were incorporated to enrich the interpretation of field findings and situate them within broader historical and scholarly contexts. Together, these

complementary sources strengthen the depth and credibility of the analysis.

Data were collected through a combination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and field documentation to capture the complexity of Bissu practices and meanings. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide that allowed flexibility for probing emergent themes, and were recorded with participants' consent using audio devices, accompanied by detailed fieldnotes. Participant observation was carried out in Segeri, Pangkep, during key ritual events such as *Maggiri* and *Mappalili*, enabling the author to observe ritual movements, symbolic gestures, spatial arrangements, and the use of ritual artifacts. Documentation included photographs, descriptive notes on cultural symbols, attire, ritual tools, and ceremonial spaces. These techniques were applied over an extended period of fieldwork to ensure depth, contextual accuracy, and consistency with the phenomenological aim of accessing lived experience. The combination of observational and interview-based data collection provided a transparent and methodologically coherent foundation for analysing how the Bissu negotiate identity, ritual authority, and sociocultural pressures.

The collected data were analysed using a combination of thematic and narrative techniques to align with the phenomenological orientation of the study. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis framework, interview transcripts and fieldnotes were first transcribed verbatim and subjected to initial coding to identify recurrent patterns related to gender identity, ritual authority, cultural negotiation, and social acceptance. These codes were then refined into broader themes and categories through iterative comparison and abstraction. Narrative analysis was subsequently applied to trace how informants constructed personal and collective stories, allowing the author to interpret the meanings embedded in their lived experiences in accordance with Moustakas's phenomenological principles. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the analysis incorporated triangulation across interview, observation, and documentation data, as well as reflexive memoing throughout the research process. Member checking was also conducted with selected informants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. This multi-layered analytical strategy provided a coherent and rigorous framework for understanding how the Bissu articulate and reconstruct their identities within contemporary socio-religious contexts.

Results and Discussion

1. Amplifying Bissu Voices: Articulating Lived Realities and Challanges

This section presents the lived experiences of the Bissu and the challenges they encounter in contemporary Bugis society, focusing on how they articulate their identities, interpret their social positions, and negotiate the pressures attached to their non-binary status. The findings derive directly from interview narratives and field observations, revealing the everyday realities faced by the Bissu as they navigate diminishing ritual roles, increasing social stigma, and shifting cultural expectations. Through these accounts, the voices of the Bissu emerge as central empirical evidence, demonstrating how their spiritual identity and cultural significance are continually tested within a socioreligious landscape that no longer provides the recognition and protection once afforded to them.

In an interview, Informant 1 expressed concern about the declining presence and authority of the Bissu, stating,

Bissu are currently becoming fewer and their role is being eroded. We are only involved by the government in certain events, for example, rice planting rituals

(*Mappalili*) and major harvests that invite many people, including government ceremonial activities" (Informant 1, personal communication, 2025).

This statement indicates that the Bissu's sacred role has been significantly reduced, with their participation increasingly limited to ceremonial functions determined by external institutions rather than by their traditional spiritual authority.

In another interview, Informant 2 described the precarious socio-economic conditions experienced by the remaining Bissu: "*This is our current situation: the Bissu who remain must struggle to support themselves and their families. We're not asking for money, but at least the government should pay more attention to our situation*" (Informant 2, personal communication, 2025). This statement points to the uncertainty of the Bissu's everyday livelihoods and the limited attention they perceive from state institutions, underscoring their dependence on individual efforts rather than structured support.

Similarly, Informant 3 highlighted the stigma attached to Bissu identity in everyday social interactions, explaining, "*Bissu are often equated by people with transvestites (homosexuals), even though we are not the same as them*" (Informant 3, personal communication, 2025). This narrative indicates that the Bissu are frequently misrecognised and associated with gender deviation in the eyes of the public, which obscures their traditional status and contributes to a narrowing of social acceptance for their role in the community.

Figure 1 Bissu groups were engaged in a variety of cultural festival activities and government-sponsored initiatives

During field observation of a government-sponsored cultural festival, the Bissu were seen standing in a line near the main performance area, as shown in Figure 1a. They wore bright, coordinated Bugis ceremonial clothing: long beige tunics covered with green woven shawls, ornate sashes, and distinctive black headdresses adorned with colourful decorations. One Bissu at the front, facing away from the camera, wore an especially elaborate red headpiece with hanging ornaments that framed the costume in a striking way. Several of the Bissu held their hands together in a greeting or prayer-like gesture while facing the crowd, while other participants and spectators could be seen in the background, indicating that their presence formed part of a scheduled segment within the wider festival programme.

In Figure 1b, the Bissu were documented in a different setting, seated in a formal arrangement on the steps of a building during a ceremonial event. One Bissu occupied the central position, dressed in layered traditional garments with a white shawl draped across the shoulders and a richly decorated headpiece, while holding a red and gold ritual tray.

Flanking this central figure were other Bissu in red and gold attire, also holding similar trays, with additional participants positioned behind them in full Bugis ceremonial dress, including towering headdresses and patterned sarongs. The composition of the scene, with the Bissu seated in the front row and other participants standing or sitting behind them, created a tableau-like image typical of official ritual or cultural presentations, with the Bissu visually framed as key ceremonial actors.

These interview excerpts and field observations reveal a consistent pattern in how the Bissu experience and interpret their contemporary position. Their narratives point not only to a decline in ritual authority, but also to material vulnerability, social misrecognition, and a growing dependence on externally defined cultural spaces. At the same time, observational data show that while the Bissu remain visually present in festivals and ceremonies, this presence is increasingly framed within curated, state-sponsored contexts rather than grounded in autonomous spiritual leadership. To synthesise these empirical findings and clarify the recurring issues across different data sources, the following table 1 summarises the key contexts, statements, and indicative themes that structure the lived realities and challenges articulated by the Bissu.

Table 1 Summary of Bissu lived experiences, contexts, and indicative themes derived from interviews and field observations

No.	Data source	Context / situation	Key statement / observation (summary)	Indicative theme
1	Informant 1	Interview on current role of Bissu	Bissu are becoming fewer; their role is eroding; they are only involved in government-defined events such as *Mappalili* and major harvest ceremonies.	Decline of sacred role; confinement to ceremonial functions
2	Informant 2	Interview on everyday livelihood and support	Remaining Bissu must struggle to support themselves and their families; they feel the government pays little attention to their situation.	Socio-economic precarity; institutional neglect
3	Informant 3	Interview on social perception of Bissu identity	Bissu are often equated with transvestites/homosexuals, despite their different identity and role.	Stigma; misrecognition of non-binary identity
4	Field observation (Figure 1a)	Government-sponsored cultural festival	Bissu stand in a line near the main performance area, in bright ceremonial dress, performing greeting/prayer-like gestures as part of a scheduled segment.	Visibility framed as curated performance; limited ritual centrality
5	Field observation (Figure 1b)	Ceremonial event on building steps	Bissu sit in a formal front-row arrangement holding ritual trays, surrounded by others in Bugis dress, forming a tableau typical of official presentations.	Symbolic centrality within staged ceremonial settings

These findings suggest that the contemporary lives of the Bissu are marked by a

persistent tension between inherited sacred status and an increasingly marginal social position. Although they continue to appear in public rituals and cultural events, their involvement is often limited to scripted, ceremonial segments rather than continuous ritual leadership. At the same time, their everyday accounts reveal economic insecurity and a lack of sustained institutional support, alongside recurring experiences of stigma and misrecognition of their identity. Empirically, this points to a widening gap between the cultural value historically ascribed to the Bissu and the social conditions they actually inhabit, in which recognition, security, and acceptance are uneven and frequently constrained.

2. Religious and Cultural Adaptation Strategies

This section presents the empirical findings on the religious and cultural adaptation strategies employed by the Bissu in contemporary Bugis society, based on interview narratives and field observations. Rather than merely enduring ongoing social and religious pressures, the Bissu actively adjust their practices and roles in order to remain present and relevant within their communities. These adaptations can be seen in two main spheres: in the religious domain, where they integrate Islamic elements such as communal prayers, the recitation of Barzanji, and the performance of the Hajj pilgrimage into their lives and ritual practices; and in the cultural–political domain, where they collaborate with local government by appearing in festivals, performing the Ma'giri dance at regency anniversary celebrations, and participating in other officially organised events that showcase local traditions.

In one interview, Informant 1 described how Bissu participation remains embedded in community life at the level of family and village celebrations, stating, "*In Segeri, Bissu are still frequently involved in celebrations and weddings, offering blessings. We also pray for safety*" (Informant 1, personal communication, 2025). This account indicates that Bissu continue to be invited to perform spiritual functions in communal events, particularly through giving blessings and leading prayers for protection, suggesting an ongoing role in the religious life of the local community despite broader pressures on their status.

In another interview, Informant 3 explained how formal agricultural rituals have been adjusted to incorporate Islamic elements, stating, "*If the Mappalili ritual ceremony is held, we also involve religious figures and Barzanji is included in it*" (Informant 3, personal communication, 2025). This description shows that the structure of the traditional Mappalili ritual now includes the presence of recognised religious leaders and the recitation of Barzanji, blending established Bugis ceremonial practices with widely accepted forms of Islamic worship.

According to this account, the implementation of Mappalili now routinely includes the presence of recognised religious leaders who are invited to participate alongside the Bissu, and the ritual sequence is accompanied by the recitation of Barzanji as part of the ceremonial proceedings. This indicates that the traditional structure of Mappalili is no longer conducted solely under Bissu direction, but is performed in a way that combines established Bugis ritual elements with forms of Islamic devotional practice that are widely accepted within the local community.

In a further interview, Informant 2 emphasised that religious practice at the individual level is also an important aspect of Bissu life, stating, "*We as Bissu also perform the Hajj pilgrimage like Muslims in general*" (Informant 2, personal communication, 2025). Complementing this, Informant 1 described how the Bissu remain

involved in officially organised cultural events, explaining, "*When the government commemorates the Regency's anniversary, Bissu are usually involved in performing the Ma'giri dance. We are always present at these events*" (Informant 1, personal communication, 2025). Field observations during such anniversary celebrations documented Bissu in full ceremonial attire performing Ma'giri on a designated stage area as part of the formal programme, framed by official banners and other performers associated with regional cultural promotion. Taken together, these accounts indicate that the Bissu engage in recognised Islamic practices such as the Hajj pilgrimage and simultaneously maintain a visible role in state-sponsored cultural performances, linking personal religious observance with participation in government-shaped arenas of cultural display.

Figure 2 Maggiri performance, as exhibited by Bissu at the Mappalili event, pertains to the practice of planting and harvesting rice, as well as to other traditional events

Field observations of Ma'giri performances further substantiate these accounts of religious and cultural adaptation. In one indoor ceremonial setting, a Bissu dressed in an ornate red and gold costume with a tall, decorated headdress was observed kneeling on a red carpet, gripping a kris with both hands while bending forward, as other Bissu in similarly bright attire performed behind and guests stood watching near an elaborately adorned backdrop (Figure 2a). In a separate outdoor procession, a Bissu wearing a red outfit, headscarf, and floral head ornament was seen holding a kris close to the upper chest or neck area, with a concentrated facial expression, while surrounded by other participants and onlookers in a crowded street environment (Figure 2b). These visual records show the Bissu performing Ma'giri both in enclosed ceremonial spaces and in public processional contexts, where ritualised movements with the kris are incorporated into community celebrations and officially organised events.

These interview and observational data indicate that adaptation is occurring on two interconnected levels. At a personal–religious level, the Bissu engage in practices recognised as core obligations within the dominant religious framework, such as performing the Hajj pilgrimage "like Muslims in general" and leading prayers for safety at community celebrations. At a cultural–political level, they cultivate formal relationships with local government by appearing regularly in regency anniversary events and other officially organised programmes, where Ma'giri is performed as part of the staged cultural repertoire, as illustrated in the documented indoor and outdoor ceremonies. Through these modes of participation, the Bissu present themselves both as observant religious actors and as visible cultural figures within public ceremonial life.

Based on these accounts, a first pattern of adaptation emerges in the form of inclusive religious practice within everyday ritual settings. Informant 1's description of

Bissu involvement in celebrations and weddings, where they "offer blessings" and "pray for safety", shows that Bissu continue to be invited into domestic and communal events primarily in a prayerful capacity. In this context, their presence is framed around activities that are widely recognised as pious and beneficial, allowing them to remain part of the community's religious life through acts of intercession and blessing.

A second pattern concerns the integration of Islamic ritual elements into established agrarian ceremonies. Informant 3's explanation that Mappalili now involves religious figures and includes the recitation of Barzanji indicates that the ritual sequence brings together Bissu-led practices with forms of devotional recitation that are familiar to the wider Muslim community. In empirical terms, the traditional structure of Mappalili is conducted not as an exclusively pre-Islamic ceremony but as a composite event in which ancestral agricultural rites and Islamic liturgical components are performed side by side.

A third pattern can be seen in the way Bissu roles are consolidated through participation in formal state events alongside personal observance of core religious obligations. Informant 2's statement that Bissu also undertake the Hajj pilgrimage "like Muslims in general", together with Informant 1's account of regular Ma'giri performances at regency anniversary celebrations and the visual documentation of these acts, shows how Bissu combine individual religious practice with highly visible appearances in government-organised cultural programmes. Through this dual involvement in recognised worship and state-framed cultural display, Bissu occupy positions as both devout religious actors and emblematic bearers of regional tradition in public ceremonial life.

These patterns of adaptation indicate that the Bissu are not passive recipients of change but actively seek out spaces in which their presence and traditions can be maintained. By positioning themselves as providers of blessings and prayers, they secure a continuing role in religiously framed family and community events. The incorporation of elements such as Barzanji into ceremonies like Mappalili enables them to remain involved in agrarian rituals that are now conducted within an overtly Islamic atmosphere. At the same time, undertaking the Hajj and appearing in Ma'giri performances at government celebrations allows the Bissu to present themselves both as observant Muslims and as visible custodians of regional culture. Empirically, these strategies show that Bissu adapt their practices in ways that keep their ritual identity recognisable and publicly acknowledged, even when this recognition is increasingly mediated through Islamic norms and state-organised cultural platforms.

3. Redefining Ritual Authority Amidst Shifting Cultural, Religious, Political Landscapes"

This section presents the empirical findings on how Bissu ritual authority is being redefined within contemporary cultural, religious, and political arenas, drawing on interview data from Informants 2, 4, 5, and 6, as well as field observations of Ma'giri performances at official events, festivals, and tourism-oriented cultural programmes. While the Bissu are still recognised as ritual leaders and guardians of Bugis tradition, their role increasingly appears in the form of staged cultural displays, public performances, and symbolic representation in government and promotional settings. The results outlined in this sub-section illustrate a shift in the configuration of Bissu authority from predominantly sacred and community-based leadership towards more visible, but often more symbolic, functions as cultural performers, tourism icons, and heritage bearers. At the same time, the data show how Bissu continue to occupy and negotiate new spaces within cultural, economic, and governmental domains, using these platforms to maintain

a degree of recognition and presence in public life.

In one interview, Informant 2 described a series of recent engagements that reflect the changing contexts in which the Bissu now perform, explaining, "*I recently returned from Papua and was invited to perform Ma'giri. I also attended a national event in Jakarta to showcase Bissu cultural traditions. We do this to meet our economic needs*" (Informant 2, personal communication, 2025). According to this account, the Bissu are not only invited to appear in local rituals but are increasingly requested to perform Ma'giri in regions far beyond their home communities, including inter-island cultural programmes such as those held in Papua. The same informant noted participation in a national event in Jakarta, where Bissu traditions were formally presented as part of a broader cultural showcase, further demonstrating how Bissu ritual practices are now incorporated into national-level performances. The statement that these activities are undertaken "to meet our economic needs" highlights that Ma'giri and similar performances serve as a source of livelihood for the Bissu. This indicates that their ritual knowledge and embodied practices are frequently engaged in settings where they function as cultural performers, and that such appearances form part of the economic strategies through which Bissu sustain themselves.

In another interview, Informant 4 described the prominent role that government institutions now play in shaping when and how the Bissu appear in public settings, stating,

> During government events, Bissu are often invited to perform. This is where we introduce Bissu to the public, at the district and even national levels, so everyone knows that Pangkep has Bissu dances. Therefore, the government maintains the Bissu in Pangkep, and the Head of the Government Tourism Office directly manages the Bissu in Segeri (Informant 4, personal communication, 2025).

This account shows that Bissu visibility is frequently mediated through official cultural programmes, where they are presented as representatives of regional identity in district-level celebrations and national showcases. It also indicates that certain governmental departments, particularly tourism offices, take an active role in coordinating and overseeing Bissu participation, suggesting that their ritual presence is increasingly framed within the structures and agendas of state-organised cultural promotion.

Informant 6 provided a complementary perspective by emphasising that the contemporary positioning of the Bissu is uneven across localities and increasingly shaped by policy variation, stating,

> Bissu today are more concerned with preserving past Bugis traditions. In some areas of South Sulawesi, their role in government is diminishing, depending on the policies of each regional head. A shift is beginning to occur, with them becoming icons of tourism promotion (Informant 6, personal communication, 2025).

This account indicates that Bissu involvement in official spheres is not stable or uniform, but contingent on local political support and the priorities of specific regional administrations. At the same time, it suggests that public recognition of the Bissu is increasingly channelled through their symbolic use in cultural promotion, where they are framed as heritage figures and tourism icons associated with the preservation and display of Bugis tradition.

During fieldwork at a government-organised cultural event, the Bissu were documented performing ritual elements within a formal institutional setting. As shown in Figure 3, the Bissu appeared at a *Seminar Kebudayaan* held at the Pangkep Regent's Office (*Kantor Bupati Pangkep*). In this setting, several Bissu were seated on the floor in

front of a seminar stage, wearing coordinated ceremonial attire in gold, green, and red, while conducting a ritual sequence involving traditional objects placed on a woven platform. One participant was observed lighting incense, while another held a ceremonial umbrella, indicating a ritualised role within the event framework. The backdrop of the scene featured official banners, seminar seating, and government insignia, situating the Bissu performance within a bureaucratic and public institutional space rather than a customary sacred site. This observation reinforces interview data indicating that Bissu ritual authority is increasingly expressed through participation in state-sponsored cultural forums, where ritual actions are embedded within educational, promotional, and representational agendas.

Figure 3 Bissu performing a ritual sequence at the Pangkep Regency Government Office.

During field observation at an international cultural forum, the Bissu were also documented *Tari Sere Bissu Maggiri* from Bone at the Internasional Seminar *Gau Maraja La Patau Soppeng 2023*. As illustrated in Figure 4, the performance took place in a large indoor hall attended by a substantial audience, including government officials, academics, cultural practitioners, and members of the public. The Bissu occupied the centre of the performance space, wearing elaborate ceremonial attire with layered fabrics, floral ornaments, and symbolic accessories, while several performers enacted ritualised movements associated with Maggiri. Surrounding them, audience members were seated closely together, many holding mobile phones to record the performance, indicating the public and highly mediated nature of the event. The positioning of the Bissu at the focal point of the hall, framed by spectators and institutional participants, reflects how their ritual performance is presented within an international seminar context as a cultural and ceremonial display.

Figure 4 "Tari Sere Bissu Maggiri" dari Bone pada Seminar Internasional Gau Maraja La Patau Soppeng 2023

These empirical accounts indicate that Bissu authority is increasingly mediated through government policy and tourism-oriented cultural agendas, which shape the settings, timing, and purposes of their public appearances. Rather than operating primarily as community-based ritual leaders, the Bissu are frequently positioned as regional cultural representatives whose performances signal local identity within official programmes. In this configuration, ritual elements such as Ma'giri are often packaged as public-facing cultural displays, oriented towards audiences beyond the immediate ritual community and presented in ways that are compatible with institutional promotion and heritage consumption.

Across the interview narratives and field observations, three key themes emerge regarding the redefinition of Bissu authority in contemporary settings. First, there is a discernible shift from sacred authority towards performative work that is also connected to economic necessity, as reflected in Informant 2's account of being invited to perform Ma'giri in Papua and at a national event in Jakarta, explicitly framed as an activity undertaken "*to meet our economic needs*" (Informant 2, personal communication, 2025). Secondly, the data indicate a narrowing of ritual authority into a more limited cultural function, where Bissu are not consistently treated as spiritual reference points across communities; instead, as Informant 5 notes, outside Segeri many residents no longer involve Bissu and regard them "*merely [as] cultural practitioners*" (Informant 5, personal communication, 2025). Thirdly, Bissu recognition and visibility appear increasingly mediated through state programmes and tourism-oriented platforms, as described by Informant 4 and Informant 6, who highlight that Bissu performances are often organised within government events, coordinated by tourism offices, and positioned as icons of regional cultural promotion (Informants 4 and 6, personal communication, 2025).

These findings indicate that Bissu authority persists, but is now exercised in a reconfigured and context-dependent form. Empirically, their authority appears more

fragmentary and situational, varying according to locality (such as particular villages), the type of occasion (ritual agricultural ceremonies, cultural festivals, or formal government programmes), and the policy orientations of regional administrations. In the settings where they remain recognised, Bissu authority is often enacted through public-facing roles as ceremonial performers and cultural representatives, with ritual elements increasingly carried into staged or institutional spaces such as seminars, district celebrations, and nationally framed cultural events. The data further suggest that everyday expressions of authority are no longer confined to closed sacred contexts, but are frequently mediated through organised performances that provide visibility and limited recognition. In this sense, the Bissu occupy an intermediate position in which ritual leadership continues to be asserted, yet is commonly realised through symbolic representation and performance-based participation in public cultural arenas.

Discussion

Across the three results sections, the findings demonstrate a consistent reconfiguration of Bissu life and ritual positioning in contemporary Bugis society. First, the Bissu experience weakening social recognition, alongside persistent stigmatisation and increasing economic vulnerability, indicating that inherited sacred status no longer guarantees everyday security or acceptance. Secondly, rather than responding passively to these pressures, the Bissu employ religious and cultural adaptations such as aligning communal practices with Islamic expressions and engaging in formally organised cultural programmes, as practical strategies to remain present and legible within dominant social frameworks. Thirdly, their ritual authority is not eliminated but reshaped, shifting from primarily sacred, community-embedded leadership towards more symbolic and institutionally mediated forms that are often articulated through public performance and official cultural representation. Taken together, these patterns suggest that Bissu continuity is increasingly dependent on negotiated spaces where tradition, religiosity, and public recognition intersect. The following discussion interprets these empirical patterns through relevant scholarship on gender, ritual authority, and the politics of culture.

The lived realities and everyday challenges identified in the first findings cluster can be read as a contemporary *crisis of social recognition*, in which Bissu identity is increasingly acknowledged only under constrained and externally defined conditions. The shift of their participation towards episodic, government-bounded ceremonial roles, coupled with reported experiences of stigma and economic precarity, suggests that Bissu legitimacy is no longer secured by inherited sacred status but must be continually performed, negotiated, and defended. Here, Butler's notion of gender performativity (1990, 1993) is useful not to collapse Bissu into modern LGBTQ categories, but to clarify how Bissu are *read* and *misread* through visible practices within a society that often defaults to binary gender expectations. In this sense, the stigma reported by informants reflects not merely "misunderstanding" but a social process in which non-binary ritual identity becomes legible only through dominant interpretive frames that narrow the space for Bissu authority as a cosmological gender identity described in prior scholarship.

The second findings cluster demonstrates that Bissu adaptation in the religious domain operates as *integration without replacement*: Islamic elements (prayer, Barzanji, pilgrimage) are incorporated to widen legitimacy while core Bugis ritual frames remain in use. Rather than indicating a simple abandonment of ancestral practice, these adaptations can be interpreted as pragmatic strategies for sustaining ritual presence in a social-religious environment where Islamic norms function as a primary public grammar of acceptability. This pattern aligns with scholarship on Islamisation in South Sulawesi

that emphasises the long-term reworking of pangngadereng through the incorporation of sara', reshaping what is publicly authorised as "proper" ritual life (Amir et al., 2024; Hasaruddin et al., 2018; Nasihin et al., 2024)

Azis (2023) further supports the view that Islam–Bissu accommodation is not entirely new, yet the present findings suggest that such accommodation has become more explicit and more central to everyday legitimacy-making, with Bissu agency expressed through selective incorporation of Islamic devotional forms as social protection and moral credibility.

The cultural–political side of these adaptations can be understood as *visibility as a negotiated space*. Participation in state-sponsored festivals and regency programmes is not merely aesthetic display, but a pathway to "authorised presence" in public life, where Bissu secure a socially safer stage through institutional sponsorship. In Geertzian terms (Geertz, 1973, 1983), these events provide a structured arena in which Bissu can reattach ancestral symbols to contemporary "webs of meaning" and make their ritual identity publicly interpretable as heritage, tradition, and regional pride—categories that are often more institutionally acceptable than claims to autonomous sacred authority. This helps explain why visibility becomes increasingly programmed and bureaucratically mediated: recognition is obtained through formal platforms that simultaneously enable presence and delimit how that presence is framed. Robinson's (2011) analysis of political contestation around identity in decentralised Indonesia reinforces why government spaces are both enabling and ambiguous, functioning as arenas where local tradition is promoted while religiously inflected moral boundaries can still shape what forms of tradition are permissible.

The final findings cluster indicates that Bissu authority is not disappearing but undergoing a *reconfiguration of ritual authority*—from predominantly sacred, community-centred leadership towards symbolic, portable, and institutionally staged forms. Two consequences follow empirically. First, authority becomes more segmented and situational: it is sustained in particular villages, occasions, and policy environments rather than operating as a stable, widely shared communal structure. Secondly, ritual practice becomes more *portable*, carried into seminars, festivals, and national programmes as curated cultural repertoire—suggesting that the site of authority shifts from closed sacred settings to public arenas of display. This resonates with existing work on the festivalisation and public staging of Bissu traditions (e.g., Akhmar et al., 2023; Jemeq et al., 2022; Pattinama et al., 2020; Rahmat & Purnomo, 2025), while the present findings add nuance by showing how such staging is tied to livelihood needs and to institutional gatekeeping, making authority simultaneously more visible and more dependent on the terms of public cultural agendas. In short, Bissu persistence is best explained not by static continuity, but by ongoing renegotiation—through strategic accommodation, symbolic modification, and selective reinterpretation—within shifting religious, political, and cultural landscapes.

This study both confirms and extends earlier scholarship on the Bissu by shifting the analytical focus from what the Bissu are in cosmological terms to how they live and negotiate their position under contemporary constraints. Previous studies that frame the Bissu primarily as a cosmological gender identity such as those by Syamsurijal, Halimatusa'diah, and Jati (2024), Rahmi and Suprihatin (2020), and Akhmar et al. (2023), have been crucial in establishing the Bissu as a sacred, non-binary category embedded in Bugis metaphysics. The present findings do not challenge this interpretation; rather, they demonstrate that this cosmological identity persists as an important symbolic reference while no longer guaranteeing social recognition or ritual authority in everyday life. By

foregrounding interview narratives, this study shows that the cosmological status highlighted in earlier work now coexists with experiences of marginalisation, stigma, and economic insecurity, revealing a gap between ontological recognition in cultural discourse and lived social reality.

In relation to the second cluster of studies that emphasise Islamisation and political marginalisation, this research aligns with findings that document the erosion of Bissu authority under religious purification and state regulation (Amir et al., 2024; Nasihin et al., 2024; Hasaruddin et al., 2018; Wildan et al., 2024). However, while much of this literature foregrounds decline, suppression, or loss, the present study adds nuance by detailing the practical strategies through which Bissu respond to these pressures. Consistent with Azis (2023), the findings confirm that accommodation with Islamic values is not new; yet they extend this insight by showing how such accommodation now operates simultaneously at personal, ritual, and institutional levels. Practices such as prayer, Barzanji recitation, and participation in the Hajj are not merely theological adjustments, but function as socially intelligible markers that enable Bissu to remain present within an Islam-dominated moral landscape.

Furthermore, this study complements and expands research on the contemporary visibility of Bissu within cultural festivals and heritage events (e.g. Akhmar et al., 2023; Jemeq et al., 2022; Pattinama et al., 2020; Rahmat & Purnomo, 2025). While earlier works often analyse these appearances through the lens of performance or cultural spectacle, the present findings situate such visibility within the broader negotiation of authority and livelihood. By documenting Bissu participation in government seminars, regency offices, and national forums, the study shows that public performance is not merely symbolic display but also a means of sustaining economic survival and institutional recognition. In this sense, the findings bridge studies of ritual performance with analyses of political governance and cultural policy, highlighting how ritual authority is increasingly shaped within bureaucratic and promotional arenas.

The contribution of this research lies in integrating cosmological, religious, and political dimensions into a single, empirically grounded account of contemporary Bissu life, while remaining firmly situated within established scholarship on Bissu as a cosmological gender identity. Previous studies have convincingly demonstrated that the Bissu occupy a sacred position within Bugis cosmology as a "fifth gender," embodying a synthesis of masculine and feminine elements and functioning as ritual mediators between the human and spiritual realms (Davies, 2010; Syamsurijal et al., 2024). Research on Bugis gender diversity further affirms that this non-binary configuration is not a social deviation but an integral cosmological system that recognises five genders, within which the Bissu serve as priestly custodians of ritual order and cosmic balance (Rahmi & Suprihatin, 2020). Comparative studies of indigenous gender systems, including the Muxes of Mexico (Mirandé, 2016) and Two-Spirit identities in Native American contexts (Brown, 2014), similarly underscore that non-binary identities are embedded in spiritual and cultural frameworks rather than reducible to modern sexual categories. Building on this body of work, the present study advances existing scholarship by demonstrating how this cosmological gender identity is not only symbolically defined but actively lived, negotiated, and rearticulated under contemporary conditions shaped by Islamic normativity, state governance, and cultural politics. In doing so, it moves beyond treating cosmology, Islamisation, and public cultural representation as separate analytical domains, instead showing how these dimensions intersect in the everyday practices through which the Bissu renegotiate ritual authority in present-day Bugis society.

The findings of this study also align with a broad body of research indicating that

Islamisation in indigenous contexts rarely entails the wholesale eradication of pre-existing ritual systems, but rather unfolds through prolonged processes of negotiation, accommodation, and selective integration. Comparative studies across diverse regions demonstrate that Islamic expansion has frequently coexisted with local ritual worlds, producing layered religious landscapes rather than uniform orthodoxies. In West Africa, Islam developed alongside indigenous earth religions through elite mediation, allowing Islamic institutions and local shrines to function in parallel (MacDonald, 2022), while in Central Asia Islamic practices evolved in dialogue with enduring Zoroastrian and Buddhist influences (Abdukadyr Kyzy, Akparali Uulu, Usmanov, & Karimova, 2025). Similar dynamics are evident in Indonesia, where syncretic forms of Islam have persisted in regions such as Bima and South Sumatra despite reformist pressures, with local rituals reworked rather than abandoned (Prager, 2010; Sakai, 2017). Studies from Sudan further illustrate how Sufi traditions incorporated local musical and ritual elements, highlighting Islam's capacity for localisation (Bozbaş & Bozbaş, 2025), while research in Indigenous Australian contexts shows how perceived cultural affinities facilitated the incorporation of Islamic values into existing identities (P. Stephenson, 2011, 2013). Situated within this comparative framework, the present study interprets the Bissu's incorporation of Islamic prayers, Barzanji recitation, and pilgrimage practices not as the replacement of Bugis ritual traditions, but as part of an ongoing process of religious negotiation through which indigenous ritual authority is recalibrated to remain socially legitimate within an Islam-dominated moral landscape.

The empirical patterns identified in this study resonate with a growing body of scholarship on festivalisation, heritage-making, and the symbolic reconfiguration of ritual in contemporary public life. Research on festivalisation demonstrates that rituals are increasingly relocated from bounded sacred settings into public, institutional, and festival-based arenas, where they are rearticulated as performances for broader audiences and embedded within cultural, political, and economic agendas (Cudny, 2016; van den Ende, 2021). In such contexts, rituals retain symbolic significance, yet their meanings are reshaped through staging, scheduling, and visual display, as documented in studies of agricultural, religious, and urban festivals across Europe, Africa, and Asia (Erdoğan Aksu, 2017; Rachkov, 2021). Scholars of ritual as performance further emphasise that festival settings intensify the mediation of ritual through embodied movement, costume, and spatial arrangement, rendering ritual authority visible and legible to public audiences (Shore, 2023; B. Stephenson, 2018). Comparative cases, including the Songkran festival in Thailand and politically inflected festivals in Mallorca, illustrate how ritual elements are preserved while simultaneously adapted to institutional and touristic frameworks (Intason, 2024; Riera & Sureda, 2024). Read alongside this literature, the relocation of Bissu rituals into seminars, government offices, and cultural festivals reflects a wider global tendency in which ritual authority is not extinguished but reconfigured as a symbolic resource operating within bureaucratic and heritage-oriented spaces. This perspective reinforces the central argument of the present study: that Bissu ritual authority persists through continuous negotiation, finding renewed expression in public and institutional arenas where visibility, recognition, and legitimacy are actively contested and reworked.

This study offers a distinct contribution by advancing a voice-driven and context-sensitive account of Bissu life that moves beyond predominantly cosmological or structural explanations found in earlier research. Whereas much of the existing literature emphasises symbolic meaning, historical positioning, or macro-level processes of Islamisation and state control, this research foregrounds the narratives of the Bissu

themselves, supported by direct field observations. In doing so, it demonstrates that adaptation is not fragmented or incidental, but unfolds as a two-level strategy linking personal religious practice (such as prayer and pilgrimage) with cultural–political performance in government-organised and nationally framed events. Furthermore, the study reframes ritual authority not as a static attribute that is simply lost or preserved, but as a form of ongoing negotiation within institutional spaces, including regency offices, cultural seminars, and public festivals. By documenting how authority is enacted, limited, and rearticulated in these contemporary arenas, this research fills a critical gap in the literature by showing how Bissu persistence is actively produced through everyday negotiation rather than secured by cosmological status alone.

These findings carry both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they suggest that research on non-binary indigenous leadership should treat ritual authority not only as a cosmological status but also as an arena-dependent form of power, shaped by where legitimacy is performed and recognised, whether in village ritual settings, state institutions, public festivals, or heritage and tourism platforms. In this sense, Bissu authority is better understood as something negotiated across shifting cultural and political spaces rather than secured solely by metaphysical position. Practically, the study implies that local governments and cultural agencies need to move beyond treating the Bissu primarily as symbolic icons for events or tourism promotion, because such framing risks further reducing ritual authority into staged representation. More sustainable support would require policies that strengthen Bissu cultural roles outside event-based programming, through consistent institutional recognition, community-level facilitation of ritual practice, and protection of their participation in local cultural life in ways that do not rely solely on periodic performances.

Conclusion

This study finds that the voices of the Bissu reflect a continuous struggle against discrimination and marginalization, primarily rooted in societal stigma toward non-binary gender identities. Despite their historically respected role as sacred ritual leaders within the Bugis cosmological system, the Bissu often face exclusion and stigmatization, particularly in contexts influenced by rigid religious orthodoxy and heteronormative gender expectations. In this situation, the Bissu adapted socially to maintain their identity as ritual leaders by combining more inclusive religious values with elements of traditional culture. Faced with evolving dynamics within society, the Bissu is being redefined through adaptive strategies that respond to changing cultural, religious, and political pressures. While traditionally rooted in sacred cosmology, their authority now also draws legitimacy from roles in cultural preservation, and tourism. This redefinition reflects the Bissu's resilience and agency in maintaining spiritual relevance while negotiating the challenges of modernity.

The main scientific contribution of this study expands scholarly discourse on gender diversity beyond Western-centric paradigms, contributing to broader debates in gender studies, anthropology of religion, and indigenous knowledge systems. This study suggests the need for greater recognition of cultural diversity and the role of traditional groups in maintaining social balance, as well as the importance of providing space for minority groups such as the Bissu to speak out and fight for their identity in the context of an evolving religion and culture.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The fieldwork was limited to one geographic and cultural site in South Sulawesi, which may not reflect the full range of Bissu experiences across different regions. The reliance on qualitative

methods, while offering depth and contextual richness, may also limit generalizability. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on gender and ritual identity without fully incorporating other intersecting dimensions such as class, education, or age. Future research could adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches, or apply intersectional frameworks to explore how multiple identity dimensions shape the experiences of Bissu and other non-binary communities in Indonesia and beyond.

References

Abdukadyr Kyzy, B., Akparali Uulu, A., Usmanov, B., & Karimova, G. (2025). Religious Development of Ancient Cities of Central Asia in the 9th-13th Centuries. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, *106*(106.3), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.3022

Akhmar, A M, Muhammad, H. I., Hasyim, M., & Rahman, F. (2023). Ritual Performance as Gradual Recognition: Sere Bissu Maggiriq Dance of South Sulawesi Indonesia. *SAGE Open*, *13*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231209634

Akhmar, Andi Muhammad, Muhammad, H. I., Hasyim, M., & Rahman, F. (2023). Ritual Performance as Gradual Recognition: Sere Bissu Maggiriq Dance of South Sulawesi Indonesia. *Sage Open*, *13*(4), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231209634

Amir, M., Aziz, M. N. I., Muslim, A., Ilyas, H. F., & Hadrawi, M. (2024). Musu' Selleng: Deconstruction of the Text and Context of Islamisation in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, *19*(2), 17–36. https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no2.2

Azis, S. A. (2023). Ancient Local Culture of the Buginese and Islam: Phenomenological Analysis of the Acculturation of Islam and the Bissu Tradition. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *15*(3), 363–375. https://doi.org/10.24204/EJPR.2023.4266

Belinda. (2022). Melampaui Nilai Biner: Dua Bissu Membela Tradisi Mereka di Sulawesi. Retrieved 22 August 2025, from New Naratif website: https://newnaratif.com/melampaui-nilai-biner/#:~:text=Melabeli bissu hanya sebagai bagian,budaya bissu%2C" pungkas Yuyun.

Bozbaş, G., & Bozbaş, F. (2025). From the Periphery to the Center: Sufi Dynamics and Islamic Localization in Sudan. *Religions*, *16*(8). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080960

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: Sage Publication, Inc.

Brown, L. B. (2014). Two spirit people: American Indian lesbian women and gay men. In *Two Spirit People: American Indian Lesbian Women and Gay Men*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315877778

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.

Cudny, W. (2016). Festivalisation and its effects on the urban space. In *Springer Geography* (pp. 77–117). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31997-1_4

Davies, S. G. (2010). Gender Diversity in Indonesia: Sexuality, Islam and queer selves. *Gender Diversity in Indonesia: Sexuality, Islam and Queer Selves*, 1–257.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203860953

Erdoğan Aksu, H. (2017). A review on the mesir macunu festival of Manisa. *Milli Folklor*, *2017*(115), 91–105. Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85031767282&partnerID=40&md5=c56784dd517e122a54d67b6ca2f0b553

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basic Books.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Geertz, C. (2017). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Hachette BookGroup.

Hasaruddin, H., Mania, S., & Anis, M. (2018). Islamization in Sinjai in the 17Th Century: the Arrifal of Islam and Social Change. *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, *23*(2), 339–362.

Intason, M. (2024). The dilemma between cultural rituals and hedonism for tourism in a cultural festival: a case study of the Lanna Songkran festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, *15*(2), 121–149. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-03-2023-0027

MacDonald, K. C. (2022). "Bamanaya is so difficult to leave behind": Archaeology, Oral History, and Islamization in the Segou Region of Mali. *Communication and Medicine*, *9*(2), 227–247. https://doi.org/10.1558/jia.25867

Mirandé, A. (2016). Hombres Mujeres: An Indigenous Third Gender. *Men and Masculinities*, *19*(4), 384–409. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15602746

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. {SAGE} Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658

Nasihin, N., Junaeda, S., & Tajuddin, F. N. (2024). Islamization in South Sulawesi and Its Institutionalisation As The State Religion (1605–1611). *KARSA Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, *32*(2), 45–66. https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v32i2.13834

Prager, M. (2010). Abandoning the 'Garden of Magic': Islamic modernism and contested spirit assertions in Bima. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *38*(110), 9–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811003665348

Prasetyo, T. W. (2022). Senjakala Bissu Bugis, Akibat Purifikasi Agama dan Komersialisasi? Retrieved 12 August 2025, from National Geographic Indonesia website: https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/133214103/senjakala-bissu-bugis-akibat-purifikasi-agama-dan-komersialisasi?page=all

Rachkov, Y. (2021). Symbolic and Ritual Practices in the Post-Soviet Urban World: Symbolic Space and Festivity in the Cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, 1990s–2010s1. *Colloquia Humanistica*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.2521

Rahmi, S. W., & Suprihatin, C. T. (2020). Beyond the male-female binary, issues of identity in Pepi Al-Bayqunie's Novel Calabai. In *Problematising Representation in Popular Culture* (pp. 89–99). Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85144181029&partnerID=40&md5=35e927cfc835c991833284f758a8b938

Riera, A. V, & Sureda, F. A. (2024). POLITICAL FESTIVALIZATION AND FESTIVE POLITICIZATION IN MALLORCA: LA MUCADA OF SINEU FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (2002-2015). *Disparidades. Revista de Antropologia*, *79*(2). https://doi.org/10.3989/dra.2024.990

Robinson, K. (2011). Sawerigading vs. Sharia: Identities and political contestation in

decentralised Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, *39*(2), 219–237. https://doi.org/10.1163/156853111X565896

Robinson, M. (2020). Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *67*(12), 1675–1690. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1613853

Sakai, M. (2017). Still remembering the origins: The continuity of syncretic Islamic practice among the Gumay (Gumai) in South Sumatra, Indonesia. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *45*(131), 44–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1274561

Shore, B. (2023). RITUAL AS PERFORMANCE. In *The Routledge Companion to the Anthropology of Performance* (pp. 64–81). https://doi.org/10.4324/b23216-6

Sidime, S. F. (2024). All Water Is Connected: African Earth Spirituality and Queering Identity in Akwaeke Emezi's Freshwater. In *Ecofeminist Perspectives from African Women Creative Writers: Earth, Gender, and the Sacred* (pp. 239–250). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-48509-1_14

Stephenson, B. (2018). Ritualization and ritual invention. In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual* (pp. 18–37). https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747871.013.43

Stephenson, P. (2011). Indigenous Australia's pilgrimage to Islam. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *32*(3), 261–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2011.565737

Stephenson, P. (2013). Syncretic Spirituality: Islam in Indigenous Australia. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, *24*(4), 427–444. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2013.816015

Syamsurijal, Halimatusa'diah, & Wasisto Raharjo Jati. (2024). Tropical Indigenous Queer as Guardians of Tradition: The Bissu of Bugis Society, Indonesia. *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics*, *23*(2), 174–196. https://doi.org/10.25120/etropic.23.2.2024.4042

Tempo. (2023). Jalan Sunyi Bissu Terakhir Bone. Retrieved 12 August 2025, from Tempo website: https://www.tempo.co/hiburan/jalan-sunyi-bissu-terakhir-bone-171982

van den Ende, L. (2021). The spatial production of festivals: Ritualization, liminality and performativity. In *The Metamorphosis of Cultural and Creative Organizations: Exploring Change from a Spatial Perspective* (pp. 93–108). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003134671-7

Wildan, W. (2024). Bissu, Victims of DI/ TII Propaganda in the Novel Arriving Before Departing Works by Faisal Oddang and Calabai by Pepi Al-Baygunie. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences (PJLSS)*, *22*(2), 5876–5890. https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.00437

This page is intentionally left blank