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**Beautiful Lives: Priests, Beauticians, and Performance of Islamic Piety in a Non-Gendered Economy in South Sulawesi, Indonesia**

By:

Umar Umar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

South and Southeast Asian Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Sylvia Tiwon, Chair

Professor Jeffrey Hadler

Professor Charles Hirschkind

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## Abstract

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by

Umar Umar

Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies and Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Sylvia Tiwon, Chair

The dissertation unravels how the indigenous transgender identity of the *bissu* experiences reconfigurations within the Indonesian modern culture dominated by Islamic heterosexual norm. Based on the data collected from the field research in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, archival research in the Netherlands, and media research, the dissertation traces the inflections of *bissu* identity at the intersection between local traditions and the emergent modern spectator community, artistic experimentation, global culture industry, and homosexual movement in the aftermath of Suharto's fall in 1998. Within this multicultural network, the indigenous identity of the *bissu* constitutes a paradox in which the convergence between the *bissu* traditional practices and modern artistic practices transcends the *bissu*'s distinct transgender position from its local reality and engenders a discursive and social space that allows the *bissu* to overcome the constraint of Islamic heterosexual norm and to provide a cultural and historical register for the urban transgender groups to claim their local cultural root. The location of the *bissu* indigeneity and transgender identity lies within the dynamic interactions among the *bissu*, the state, and culture industry, in which moral sentiments and aesthetic sensibility emerge in their distinct forms. The research poses a critique against the failure of the mainstream narratives to address the emerging moral space the *bissu* inhabit. The space, which I call a *spiritual aesthetic space*, contains disparate religious and cultural elements as the *bissu* unite three strands of identity: transgender, Islamic, and indigenous.

For my father, Thamrin Mardhan

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### A. *Bissu*: Body and Gender as Tradition

Followed the so-called Asian monetary crisis at the end of 1997 is the downfall of Suharto's New Order in 1998. The euphoria of freedom and the hope for a clean government among Indonesian citizens overshadowed the global panic over the economic crisis. In this critical moment, we witness the rise of Islamic political parties and the new visibility of Islamic piety, capturing the spirit of the new era: Reformation Era. On the other side, those who are marginalized during the New Order, find a political space to articulate their existence. Adat communities (indigenous communities) and LGBT people begin to occupy and shape the political discourse in Indonesia. Within this context, this research emerges.

The *bissu*, a community of traditional transgender priests of South Sulawesi, in collaborations with the *adat* council, local government and cultural activists, has initiated their return right after the fall of the New Order. Saidi, their new leader was inaugurated by the government and adat council, and their old regalia house was replaced by a new one in 2001. Their public visibility shapes the discourse on religious tolerance, transgender identity and national culture, and brings back the colonial imagination of a transgender ancient Bugis community. The LGBT people in South Sulawesi and Indonesia find their cultural root in the *bissu*. This claim of locality looks unproblematic on the surface. Yet, as we go through the narratives and embodiments of transgender identity among the *bissu*, we will find their distinct position, separating them from urban LGBT groups. In this dissertation, I will explicate the distinct position of the *bissu*. In my analysis, I draw on methods and concepts in queer studies, critical theory, religious studies, and Southeast Asian studies to trace the identity configurations of the *bissu* through the *bissu*'s syncretic Islamic traditions, performances of Islamic piety, and transgender practices. My work is aimed at deciphering the moral and aesthetic constellation in which the performances - and narratives - of the *bissu* unfold. How narratives, outlooks and the performances have moral bearings are my main concern. I look into the emerging moral space the *bissu* inhabit. The space contains disparate religious and cultural elements as the *bissu* unite three strands of identity: transgender, Islamic, and indigenous.

My concern resonates with the questions asked by the scholars of queer studies: how the body, outlook, movement invoke moral sentiments. I investigate how the *bissu*'s body, outlook, and movement serve as a contact zone, to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's term,<sup>1</sup> for they contain disparate moral values as the outcome of the *bissu*'s interactions with scholars, artists, cultural activists, government, conservative Muslims, LGBT people, and local peasants. In other words, it is my attempt to demonstrate how the *bissu* transgender priesthood emerges on screen and stages, and in rituals and everyday life, as the outcomes of inter-cultural and inter-religious interactions. Moreover, it is also my modest attempt to contribute to the ongoing debate on the intersection of art and indigeneity in Indonesia.

In my attempt to decenter the debates on transgender identity, tradition, and religion in Indonesia, I seek to unravel how the indigenous transgender identity of *bissu* undergoes multiple

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession*, 1991, 33-40.

reconfigurations within Indonesian modern culture, one that is dominated by Islamic heterosexual norms. It traces the inflections of *bissu* identity at the intersection between local traditions and the emergent modern spectator community, artistic experimentation, the global culture industry, and homosexual movement in the aftermath of Suharto's fall in 1998. Within this multicultural network, the indigenous identity of *bissu* constitutes a paradox in which the convergence between *bissu* traditional practices and modern artistic practices transcends the *bissu*'s distinct transgender position, shifting it from its local reality and engendering a discursive and social space that allows the *bissu* to overcome the constraints of an Islamic heterosexual norm.

I view the transgender body of the *bissu* serves as a site of culture, history, religion, power and kinship. Performing the pious body, the *bissu* resolve their normative obstacle to claim their distinct position within the Bugis culture dominated by heterosexuality and Islamic conservatism. Yet, it provides a cultural and historical register for urban transgender groups to claim their local cultural roots. Within this contradiction, the *bissu* body serves as a site of contested moral and aesthetic practices, rather than a monolithic (trans)gender identity.

With the increase in the collaborations of indigenous people and avant-garde artists, I use this as an opportunity to look into the relationship between performance and moral subject position. The intervention of the avant-garde theaters leads to the loss of cultural reference and to the shift from the moral values to ideas about the sublime as a notion that is rooted in the secular practices of theater.<sup>2</sup> This poses a daunting challenge to indigenous people as the intervention begins to shift the relevance of indigenous religious practices, away from local communities to the global spectators. I look into how the transgender priesthood emerges and changes as it circulates and moves beyond its local symbolic and cultural constraints, and how this move leads a problematic situation in which the *bissu* revives regardless of the gradual decline of their *bissu*'s local social relevance. The critical question I ask is thus: how does the *bissu* sustain their social relevance? The answer I propose is not located at the intersection of the *bissu*'s maintenance of what I call aesthetic spiritual space that allow the *bissu* to resolve the problems of morality while constituting their distinct cultural role that is imagined to be rooted in the ancient communities of South Sulawesi. This aspect of my research will also endeavor to explore the reminiscence of surrealist thinking in the contemporary understanding of culture, i.e. culture as being different from mundane activities, culture as utopian and idyllic; and culture as an extraordinary event. Even though this understanding of culture has been criticized,<sup>3</sup> but it remains hidden in the practice and politics of representation and writings on culture.

I also pose a critique of the inadequacy of *adat* – the concept used to refer to custom and indigeneity in Indonesia – to discuss non-settler indigenous communities such as *bissu* (for further discussion on *adat*, please read the section on “Polemics on *Adat*” in this chapter). The *bissu* do not face the immediate problems encountered by the settler-*adat* communities such as land loss and resettlement. They do not share the narratives of the settler-*adat* communities such

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<sup>2</sup> The collaboration of the *bissu* and Robert Wilson, an eminent American avant-garde playwright on staging the Bugis mythical epic of *I La Galigo* provokes the debate on the local and national media on the loss of cultural values of the Bugis. We find the same critique posed to Antonin Artaud's interpretations on what he calls as the Balinese theatre he watched in the colonial cultural exposition in Paris in 1931. For further information on the critiques, see Ratna Sarumpaet, “*I La Galigo*: Panggung Megah, Miskin Makna [*I La Galigo*: Glorious Stage, Poor Meanings,” *Kompas*, March 21, 2004; Nicola Savarese, “1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 45, no. 3 (2001): 51–77.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary,” in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (New York: Verso, 1989), 3–18.

involving concepts of sovereignty, self-sufficiency, subsistence economy, and resistance to globalization and capitalism. The problem they face has more to do with how to create discursive and social spaces for their own survival. To include the *bissu*, the definitions of *adat* must be revisited.

Transgender identity in Indonesia and Southeast Asia falls under two dichotomous categories: traditional and cosmopolitan. Yet, they intersect as they are positioned against state-institutionalized religions, Islam in particular. Traditional transgender subjects are often depicted with their ancient outlooks and ritual practices that are imagined to pass through generation without or with less of interventions of Islamization and modernization. Cosmopolitan transgender subjects are often seen as a Western cultural import, belonging to neither the local traditions nor Indonesian modern nationhood. The two strands of transgender identity not only project particular rural and urban outlook, but also invoke moral sentiments. The traditional transgender people employ local cultural registers and use local vernacular terms in invoking their identity, in contrast, the cosmopolitan transgender people employ liberal moral values such as freedom and human rights in claiming their space in the Islamic-dominated national culture.

I observe several attempts to break the dichotomy by engaging closely with the local registers that the cosmopolitan transgender people employ. We find these attempts in the works of anthropologists such as Tom Boellstorff, Sharyn Graham Davies, Evelyn Blackwood, and linguist and LGBT activist Dede Oetomo. The integration of ethnography and historiography they employ constitutes an interesting analytical frame where ethnographic research is aimed at deciphering the meanings of cultural practices in the lacunae of the discourses and performances of transgender. In their discussions, the diversity and difference of Indonesian articulations of transgender are explored under the rubrics of domesticity, housewifery and citizenship. To explicate how the local transgender individuals embody their transgender identities, they scrutinize local vernacular terms and local appropriations of Western terms in which the practices are registered such as *banci* (male transvestite), *gai* (gay), *lesbi* (lesbian) and *tomboi* (female transvestite). Oetomo finds that the translation of *banci* as lesbian we find among scholars and urban Indonesians does not give the whole picture of *banci* subjectivity in Indonesia, since *banci* possess aggressive character and play a sexual role as a penetrator, character and role considered masculine in Indonesian culture. Bisexual is what Oetomo argues as the most appropriate translation for *banci*.<sup>4</sup> Tom Boellstorff explores the distinct position of gay and *lesbi* Indonesians under the lens of the national media practices. He argues that gay and *lesbian* subjectivity in Indonesia is constituted as a form of dubbing culture in which “gay and *lesbi* individuals [see] themselves as part of a global community, but also as authentically Indonesian.”<sup>5</sup> Blackwood explicates the complicated articulations of transgender identity, especially *tomboi*, prescribed by heterosexual norms such embedded in Islamic piety, citizenship, and domesticity.<sup>6</sup> The main focus of their analysis how individuals embody their transgender or transsexual identities, and what kinds of narratives and norms they use to support their identities. Central to their discussion is not tradition and ritual but the body not the community with their conventional norm but an individual tied to the notion of intimacy, love, and freedom. With this research orientation, the research projects are conducted in homosexual groups in urban areas

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<sup>4</sup> Dede Oetomo, “Gender and Sexual Orientation in Indonesia,” in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 269.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, *Falling into the Lesbi World* (Hawai'i: University of Hawaii Press, 2010).

with the focus on the struggles of the homosexual individuals to live in the local cultures dominated by heterosexuality and religious conservatism.

On the other side, we still find those who engage with transvestites figures in Indonesian folk cultures such as *Warog-Gemblak* of Java,<sup>7</sup> *Nganjuk* of South Kalimantan,<sup>8</sup> and *Bissu* of South Sulawesi.<sup>9</sup> *Warog-Gemblak* is a Javanese folk dance depicting spiritual, erotic (homosexual) and companionate relationship between the *Warog* (prince) and *Gemblak* (transgender male). *Nganjuk* shamans are viewed as embodiments of sacred androgynies. *Bissu* are popularly defined as transgender ritual specialists. In exploring the complexity of the local transgender identities, the scholars deploy local narratives and normative terms. On the *Gemblak-Warog*, Petkovic rejects the popular perception that this pair engage in a homosexual relationship, arguing that a *Gemblak* provides companionship during a *Warog's* exile. Yet he admits that *Warog-Gemblak* dancers perform erotic gestures such as petting and kissing.<sup>10</sup> A.L. Tsing describes *Nganjuk* shamans view themselves as the embodiment of neither male nor female but of a divine being.<sup>11</sup> Emphasizing different aspects of *bissu* cultural practices, Matthew Kennedy, H.Th. Chabot, Leonard Andaya, Halilintar Lathief, and Sharyn Graham Davies define *bissu* primarily as transgender priests.<sup>12</sup> Kennedy accentuates the symbolic meanings and transgender markers of the *bissu* ritual costumes. Chabot asserts that *bissu* is a ritual role performed by men, women, and transgender celibates. Andaya, Lathief, and Davies explore *bissu* transgender performances in relation to local spiritual practices and myths. With their emphasis on rituality and tradition, the scholars in this group constitute the traditional transgender identities within the local narratives, implying that they are live isolated from those who are identified as urban homosexual groups. They ground their analysis more on ritual and tradition to answer the questions of how the rituals and traditions bear distinct transgender identities. This makes their argument vulnerable when it comes to the questions about the influence of modern life on the traditional transgender individuals, and how they support their lives with the absence of traditional institutions – what kinds of profession they perform to earn living, an aspect that is very central to the modern construct of identity as it is pointed out by Kenneth Burke in his discussion on corporate identity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, “Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis,” *New York*, 1942, 17–92; Margaret J. Kartomi, “Performance, Music and Meaning of Reyog Ponorogo,” *Indonesia*, no. 22 (1976): 85–130. [See too Christina Sunardi’s new book.]

<sup>8</sup> Bateson and Mead, “Balinese Character”; Kartomi, “Performance, Music and Meaning of Reyog Ponorogo.” Kalimantan?

<sup>9</sup> Halilintar Lathief, *Bissu: Pergulatan Dan Peranannya Di Masyarakat Bugis [Bissu: Their Struggle and Role in the Buginese Society]* (Depok: Desantara, 2004); Sharyn Graham Davies, *Challenging Gender Norms: Five Genders Among Bugis in Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Wadsworth Publishing, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Josko Petkovic, “Waiting for Karila: Bending Time, Theory and Gender in Java and Bali (With Reflections for a Documentary Treatment),” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 2 (1999), <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/11668/>.

<sup>11</sup> A. L. Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kennedy, “Clothing, Gender, and Ritual Transvestism: The *Bissu* of Sulawesi,” *Men’s Studies* 2, no. 1 (August 1993): 1–13; H. Th. Chabot, *Kinship, Status and Gender in South Celebes* (Nederland: KITLV Press, 1996); Leonard Andaya, “The *Bissu*: A Study of a Third Gender in Indonesia,” in *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Barbara Watson Andaya (Hawai’i: Center for Southeast Asia Studies, 2000), 27–46; Lathief, *Bissu*; Davies, *Challenging Gender Norms*.

<sup>13</sup> See Burke’s discussion on Identity, Identification in Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (University of California Press, 1984), 263–87.

In the dichotomies constructed by the mainstream research, transgender communities in Indonesia play a central position as epistemic subjects in the development of theories on transgender subjectivity in the West. Yet, besides the diversity of approaches that the scholars deploy, the operating assumption remains the same: Indigenous identity resides in rural areas and survives despite the forces of urbanization and secularization. Pious, mythical, traditional, self-sufficiency, and sovereignty are the characterizations that are perpetuated in the discussion of the so-called traditional transgender communities. The constant interaction between the state, global institution and market economy fundamental to the development of indigenous communities in Indonesia remain underdiscussed.

To reach the goals, I organize the chapters as follows:

1. On chapter 1: "Introduction," I explain the main problems and the contributions of the dissertation, as well as clarifying two confusing terms that are often taken for granted that their meanings and understandings remain unchanged despite the constant changes that the *bissu* undergo. These terms are: *adat* and *bissu*.
2. On chapter 2: "Tradition of the Living and the Dead," I redefine tradition through the lenses of critical theory and the *bissu*'s cultural practices. Tradition I employ in this context is used as a moral concept that binds the living and the dead. I also demonstrate the correlation between tradition and performance and look into the validity and the limit performance/ performativity-based theory of identity and race theory in discussing pious - traditional - transgender communities such as *bissu*.
3. On chapter 3, "Hermaphrodite Priests of the Bugis," I discuss the discursive ground in which the *bissu* manage to articulate their own distinct identity. I lay out hermaphrodite as a narrative trope rooted in Hindi-Buddhist and Hellenistic traditions. It is not an exhaustive discussion on the literary traditions but sufficient to give us a ground to discuss in what moral contexts the *bissu* transgender priesthood is projected. We will use this trope to look into the *bissu*'s performances on screen and stages. This is the chapter where I place the interactions among art, tradition, culture, and religion under scrutiny, and their limit and fluidity to articulate the *bissu*'s distinct moral and (trans)gender position.
4. On chapter 4: "Behind the Scene: the *Bissu*'s Struggle to Survive," we explore how *bissu* respond to changes, and whether or not their practices cultural and economic practices remain relevant to the local peasants.
5. On chapter 5: "Different Fields, Different Stories describes the lag between the *bissu*'s everyday life and the mediated representations of the *bissu*," I write in a colloquial way to invoke my own subjective position and the plurality of the *bissu*'s articulations of their (trans)gender subjectivity and diversity of their views on tradition, modernity, and Islam. My discussions center on six *bissu*: Nika, Ciang, Rusda, Mina, Ina, and Japa. I end the chapter with *mappalili* (rice planting ritual), the festivity that is very central to the *bissu*'s traditional authority.
6. On Chapter 6: "Paradox Life," I draw a conclusion. This is the chapter where I emphasize what we learn from the *bissu*, what is the role of the (trans)gendered body, rituals, and traditions; and how the *bissu* inform us and pose critiques against our conservative views on traditions and concepts that are often placed beyond their limit of time and space, diminishing the capacity and creativity of traditional communities to solve their problems, to negotiate their own interests, and to provoke changes.

## B. Polemics on *Adat*

*Adat* is central to the claim of *bissu* priesthood and transgender subjectivity. Since the concept is overused, it is often taken for granted that *adat* always means custom, way of life, and (authentic – local) tradition. It is a concept that is used contradictive to globalization, modernity, and Islam. It is translated in English as custom or tradition. *Komunitas adat* (*adat* community) is a term that is synonymous with indigenous people in the West – it signifies the sovereignty of an *adat* community over their land and their culture. I do not engage with the polemic around that the concept of *adat*, since it will lead to the digression from the main theme of the dissertation. What I would like to do is to elaborate briefly the politics and polemics of *adat* that are relevant to the struggle of the *bissu* to survive.

Three problems are pivotal: 1. *adat* as normative and aesthetic practice; 2) *adat* as a liberatory narrative for the oppressed minority; 3) *adat* as a means of legal protection of indigenous rights. Within this context, I revisit some definitions of *adat* that are generally accepted but polemical. My aim is not to assess the fallacies of those definitions but to decipher the motifs of the debates that often have perverse consequences in the colonial, national, and international projects of protection and development. The articulation, commodification, reification, and ratification of *adat* are central in these multifaceted narratives and practices of *adat*. While the discussion on the legal dimension of *adat* is predominant in Indonesia, I will confine my discussion to contextualize why (epistemic) attitudes towards *adat* are very diverse. *Adat* as a legal system leads to the reification of *adat*, for the legal articulation is oriented not to the community but to the practice itself. The projects of protection and development are constitutive of the survival and revival of both courtly and primitive faces of *adat* community. Within this context, *Adat* is (re)presented in its nostalgic voice and exotic outlook.

Currently, it is hardly possible to speak of *adat* in its non-institutional forms. *Adat* is always tied to *adat* institutions such as palaces, royal descendants, local *adat* organizations, and so on. Moreover, the colonial archives, royal institutions, (*adat*) villages have become the sites from which to observe *adat*. Since I observe that the diverse understandings of *adat* are less located in the local regions, I will also explore how the articulations of *adat* are related to modernity and globalization. The regional observation of *adat* will not be able to expose the intricacy with which *adat* and modernity are mutually constitutive. Archives and cultural artifacts themselves in the hands of scholars shall be seen not as a source but a production of knowledge. They inform what happens during the colonization, but more often they expose the vulnerability of the colonial government.

### 1. The Past

*Adat* is commonly used in reference to local custom and social structure. It is considered, sometimes skeptically, to have been passed down over many generations. While it is generally accepted that *adat* is orally transmitted through poetic expressions, what is often ignored is that the beautiful rhymes of poems, the enchanting colors of design and motif, the smooth textures of sculpture, and the graceful movements of dances, all occupy our sensuous experience: our memory. This memory is constructed neither in subject nor in object, neither in form nor in content, neither in artist nor in the beholder, but in the intimate and intricate engagement between them. What animates this engagement is desire. To desire and to be desirable are transformative, for they provoke conflict, rupture, and integration. Some scholars have deduced that as long as the indigenous people remain confident in the oral transmission, *adat* is still alive,



since we observe that the transcriptions of *adat* begins when the traditional institutions are in the process of decay. Some might even go further to claim that the codification marks the death of the indigenous subject. But, writing itself is not merely a colonial invention, for the indigenous people may well have their own systems of writing; the *bissu* certainly do: It is aesthetic and spiritual. Writing is a divine work for to write is to give life, spirit. Writers are the media through which gods speak; writers are not authors, for authors are the creators: the creators are gods. In the poetic expressions of orality and writing, what is perpetuated is *rasa*, as Geertz uses in the Javanese context, a word Malays use when they taste food, when they express their emotions and thoughts, and when they talk about spirit and life.<sup>14</sup> *Rasa* implies that members of Malay communities recognize no dichotomy between the tongue that tastes and the soul that feels, between the trembling body and the capricious soul.<sup>15</sup>

*Rasa* is not a philosophy but an ethical and aesthetic life: it helps to determine social identity. We need to recuperate it and bring it up in our interpretations of *adat*. We find the local subject has been lost in the rigidity of law, in the beautiful rhymes of poems. The spirit of *adat* does not reflect local subjectivity. And, *adat* has become frozen in the narrative of survivalism and authenticity. The current discourse suggests that the future of *adat* is preservation. But, the preservation becomes impossible because it evokes solidification. And this solidification under the names of authenticity and tradition discursively, sometimes coercively, situates the indigenous people in a dilemmatic position, a position in which *adat* becomes central to the local identity but fails to fulfill the local necessity.

*Adat* is often traced from the grave and how the dead past reincarnates in the present. This is reasonable since the grave is the sign that separates life and death. The grave is the memory of the past, and the dead remains alive in that memory (often becoming the spirit of present life). Memory is possible because of this separation. It is neither subjective nor objective, but sensuous and intuitable. It is located neither in the graves nor in the minds of those who visit them, but in the intimate relation with the dead.

*Adat* projects the past as something perfect, pure, therefore to be preserved. If the past is traumatic and oppressive, which is often the case when the future appears to be brighter, *adat* then does not liberate communities from the burden of the past. In the colonial and national discourse, *adat* is posed as an objective condition in its parasitic relationships with local aesthetic and ethical practices. It functions to create a political and economic condition that fits with the orientation of progression that the colonial and national governments propagate, i.e. the need to make a future appear "brighter" – light is a metaphor used in reference to progression from traditionality to modernity, or from the past to the future, as we find in title given to the collection of Kartini's letters to her Dutch friends: *Door Duisternis tot Licht (From the Darkness to Light)*; and as it is suggested on the 1937 edition cover of *Poedjangga Baroe*, in which "manusia baru (new human being)" is depicted as a shadow emerges from a dark of the past – *adat* – into the light of future – modernity.

*Adat* in mainstream discourse becomes a romantic narrative, an effect of the elite imagination, while the oppression and manipulation of *adat* are rarely discussed, for *adat* is considered essentially positive and harmonious, and apolitical. The traumatic past that marks the face of *adat* remains obscure. Communalism in *adat* can serve as a warning of perceived dangers

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<sup>14</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), 124, 134–35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–36.

of communism, radicalism, and subversion.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the incorporation of *adat* into the collective consciousness by the colonial and national governments cannot accommodate the heterogeneity of the ethnicities in the archipelago. This centralized and monolithic conception of *adat* becomes ironic. Promoted as a site of social cohesion and national sentiment, it turns to provoke violence, exclusion, and inequality. On the other side of the polemics, critique, retrospect and lamentation falter, for *adat* has been a discourse by which indigenous rights and institutions are recognized.

## 2. Sexuality

Discussing sexuality in relation to *adat* is perplexing. Let me describe this in the issue of sexual liberation, in which we find the ambiguous relationship among *adat*, modernity, and Islam. It is in the narrative of sexual liberation, that we find the collapse of the boundary between *adat* and modernity. Even though we may find the origin of sexual liberation in *adat*, but the potential of *adat* to participate in the sexual liberation, or sexual pluralism, is overshadowed by its global and modern articulation. The debate on pornography and *adat* in Indonesia confirms and reinforces the hostility and high potential for conflict between Muslims and *adat* communities.

This hostility and conflict develop further in the context of sexual freedom. *Adat* functions as rhetoric to claim that the sexual liberation emerges locally. It is reasonable to return to the local narratives, but it is often taken literally without contextualization. We find the publication of what people often call "local Kama sutra" and other local elaborate sexual narratives. People begin to read them in juxtaposition with the other modern sexual novels. We may even find homosexual characters named after figures of folktale and legend. In this context, I find reading Ayu Utami's 1998 novel, *Saman* with its phallic totemism in juxtaposition to the 19th century Javanese poem (*Suluk*) *Gatoloco* intriguing for suggesting how *adat*, modernity, and Islam are related in a distinctive way: dialectical and transformative, while yet remaining deeply ambiguous. *Saman* and *Gatoloco* should lead us to a dynamic contextualization that suggests how polemical it can be to discuss *adat* as an objective condition while excluding its agents. Yet, both these texts conjure up the imagination of a seductive *adat* in its encounter with strict (legalistic) Islam – in the *Suluk* *Gatoloco*, we find the depiction of *Gatoloco* as "a monster and yet the perfect human," a translation suggested by Benedict Anderson for Philippus van Akkere's thesis: "Een gedrocht en toch de volmaakte mens: de Javaanse Suluk Gatolotjo." "Perfect Human" is, in Arabic: *Insan al Kamil* (which is also translated into English Universal Man), is a concept of used in the Sufi tradition in reference to the perfection of human through realization of their divine quality, their communion with God.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. Unique

In their narratives scholars of *adat* mostly emphasize the *unique* characteristics of *adat*. I argue that *uniqueness* as a concept is not constructed in the local community, but in the global circulation. Something *unique* is not determined without comparison. Belonging to the economy of seeing, *unique* is not of substance but form. It is rarely used, if at all, in the local articulations

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<sup>16</sup> B. Schrieke, "The Causes and Effects of Communism on the West Coast of Sumatra (1928)," in *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings. Vol. 1* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1955).

<sup>17</sup> For a brief explanation on this term, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (SUNY Press, 1972).

of *adat*. The indigenous people practice what they think effective to support their everyday life. *Unique* as a sensuous form is never represented without the desire of spectators. *Adat* tends to be discussed in terms of the intricate relationship between the global economy of visuality and practicality in the community, propagating a view of *adat* void of normative and ethical values. It becomes pivotal to observe how the global economy impacts the local practices and how the local communities see this change.

Let me digress at this point before deciphering the physiognomy of *adat* that we are familiar with in their local and global displays. In Indonesia, some terms are used synonymous to *adat* community (*suku adat*): minority, *Komunitas Adat Terpencil/ KAT* (Marginal *adat* community), *suku terasing* (isolated tribe), and *suku primitif* (primitive tribe). *Adat* community is defined, according to AMAN (an alliance of Indonesian indigenous people), as "community living together based on their origins intergenerationally in *adat* land (*tanah adat*), who have sovereignty over the land and the natural resources, sociocultural life regulated by *adat* law and *adat* institutions which manage the sustainability of the communities' lives." In this view, *adat* is tied to the institutions of *adat* such as *adat* land. The main problem is that *adat* land is a legal language institutionalized in the state's regulation. In this context, *adat* is often projected in the ecological outlook. The communal sense in this definition is tied to regionalism. In other words, the discursive *adat* cannot help but advocate the validity of the division of *adat* based on territoriality and kinship. Within the spatial and genetic constraints, *adat* often contains behaviors which are considered primitive. It prioritizes the crude depiction of life, the simple life. It is an ironic depiction, for the modern depiction of the simple life evokes the feeling of loss, while the modern political project describes it as an immature life. If the values they try to cultivate are embedded in the 'savage' faces they are looking at, how do the modern subjects refine the *adat* communities to be commensurable with the modern civilization without destroying the values that they try to recuperate in the communities? Protection and development projects elevate as well as alienate the *adat* subjects. This is where we find *adat* community analogous with *asing* to be excluded and isolated from modern life and local quotidian life.

*Komunitas Adat Terpencil*, a redundant combination, suggests that their condition is "left behind" (*tertinggal*) due to their inaccessibility – they cannot get public service and are unable to participate in the development projects of modern progress (see also the definition of *suku terasing*, by the Department of Social Affairs 1992, Regulation No. 2). To facilitate development, the government establishes a transportation infrastructure and schools. But, it is often the case that the economy of the communities becomes worse for they are no longer autonomous, and become dependent upon the bureaucratic system.

We find some problematic relationships such as the right to live in the local traditional ways might be contradictory to the rights to education, economy, and politics, and the right not to be marginalized in the public life of the state. The project of protection is aimed at protecting the authentic and *unique* properties of *adat*. The project of civilization is aimed at elevating the primitive life. And, ironically, it is the primitive face that the institutions (the state, non-government organizations, scholars, and so on) promote as the face of the *adat* communities. In this ambiguous view, I would say that the outlooks are the same but they have different connotations. And these connotations are related not to the identities that might be contained in the concepts but to political and legal projects.

#### 4. Citizenship

What is the face of the modern Indonesian citizen? This question leads us to a consideration of the tension between *adat* and modernity. This is evident in the polemic that Indonesian poets have engaged in since the early nineteenth century. The polemic gained particular intensity in the period of *Pujangga Baru* (New Poet). While it is not hard to define tradition and modernity in this context of the debate, what is more revealing is that the debate demonstrates that tradition and modernity are not positions but processes. They are like an ocean: it is violent on the surface but calm beneath. The big waves of the debate are brought into play by the external wind, not by the internal calm stream. Then the answer to the question, if we listen to the *Pujangga Baru* poets, is that the Indonesian citizens are individual, rational, and refined citizens. It is difficult to constitute such Indonesian national citizens under the register of *adat*, and yet it remains acceptable to argue that Indonesian citizens are faceless without *adat*.

Art in Indonesia cannot be separated from *adat* and politics. And, the sense of nationalism is also tied to literature and the new romanticism developed by Dutch-educated elites, *priyayi*, and poets. The promotion of literature is not seen as Art for the Art sake, but often oriented towards providing a sense of nationalism through the emergence of the national language. These issues are related to the idea of integration for an archipelago whose native languages are very diverse. Hence, *kesusastraan* (literature) is performative for it envisions and propagates the modern Indonesian character. In *kesusastraan*, one finds that the depiction of the Indonesian citizenship is more explicit, the characterization of modernity and traditionality more elaborate, the debate on whether or not to maintain spirituality more intense, and the tension between liberalism and socialism more obvious. The discussion on *adat* includes *kesusastraan* as a productive context. Moreover, through the poets as mediators, travelers (wanderers), writers, and spiritual figures, the vexed relationship between power, hegemony, and *adat* becomes to some extent decipherable.

#### 5. Minority and Religion

“*Minoritas* (minority)” is adopted as a legal concept to protect *adat* communities; in many cases *adat* community is identical with the minority. But, the protection of the minority is based on the consent of the majority, the state, the national and the international organizations. It becomes the way to assess democracy in a country. And it should be also noted that it is through legal discourse that minority identity becomes conceivable.

The institutional interventions in *adat* life invoke the archaic face of *adat*. While the attitudes towards the incorporation of *adat* into positive law are divisive, this discursive project often ignores social, political, and economic reality of citizens. Moreover, it is inescapable that in order to make the demand to claim *adat*, one must preserve a particular way of life distinct from the majority. It confirms that *adat* is practiced only by the exclusive minorities. This legal view of *adat* weakens the foundation of *adat*. It leads *adat* to an ideological competition.

In the context of the Muslim communities, this becomes even more problematic, for it constitutes the minority complex of *adat* Muslims. Even though *adat* Muslims are oppressed and blamed for their hybrid practices, we still observe that the struggle within Indonesian Muslims to avoid being positioned in a subordinate position vis-a-vis Middle-Eastern Islam resorts to *adat* as a distinctive cultural outlook for Indonesian Islamic piety. Under the register of liberal Islam, ironically *Islam kultural* (*cultural Islam*, propagated by those who claim themselves as liberal Muslims, harnesses along with the hostility of Islam to *adat* promoted by those who claim

to purify Islam from local traditions. Moreover, that the issues of conservatism in Indonesia are globally orchestrated under the warnings of terrorism and secularization (Westernization) leads to a perception that *adat* is antagonistic to Islamic piety in Indonesia. And yet, ironically it remains true that, for most *adat* communities, religious piety or spirituality if you will is essential to the survival of *adat*.

Who then is the minority in need of protection? And, for what purpose? Minority as a normative term not only demands the consent of the majority, but also constitutes the minority as non-autonomous social entity, open for external intervention to protect and develop itself. *Adat* under the register of minority becomes the site of global and national intervention that often harnesses the gap between *adat* and religion, and cultural Islam and scriptural Islam. Perpetuating the colonial depiction of *adat* and Islam in their antagonistic relationship, the global and national interventions obfuscate the mutual-transformative relationship between *adat* and Islam in the local religious practices. This gap even reflects in the division of piety in Islam: Sufism and *Shariahism*, portraying that Sufism is more tolerant to *adat* since it concentrates on soul not on the outlook and formality, is positioned in direct contrast to *Shariahism* as intolerant of *adat* because of its constriction to texts and the formality of rituals. However, one cannot ignore that during the colonial administration, in the absence of a communal language of nationhood, the sentiment of anti-colonialism was provoked by Muslims through the formal outlook of Islam, the outlook that cannot be classified in the rigid division of Sufism and *Shariahism*. In the Muslim communities themselves we find the global and national condemnation of fundamentalism as a source of violence, therefore the project to make Muslims more liberal and moderate uses *adat* as a test case. *Adat* for the Muslims then becomes a word to liberate their "minority" status from the constraint of Islamic orthodoxy and scriptural traditions that are considered to be imported from the Middle-Eastern culture, and to claim for their local – cultural – belonging.

In Bali heresy is not an issue associated with *adat*. The discourse of *Ajeng Bali*, or *Ajeng Hindu*, suggests that the problem is the complicity of *adat* with modernization and secularization, which weakens the Balinese identity (*kebalian*). The slogan "return to roots" is understood as a call to awaken religiosity of the Balinese, or to return to the Indian origin as the foundation of *Kebalian* and to claim the membership in the Hindu ecumene.<sup>18</sup> Hinduism is claimed to be the foundation of *adat*: "as long as the Hindu religion is still *ajeg* [erect] in Bali, the Balinese culture will be *ajeg* as well (*sepanjang agama Hindu masih Ajeg di Bali maka kebudayaan Bali akan tetap Ajeg*)."<sup>19</sup> Yet, some express their concern with the consequence of this program, i.e.: creating a static, exclusive and fundamentalist outlook of Balinese.<sup>20</sup>

The above argument is valid only in the antagonistic relationship between religion and *adat*. But, this is not always the case. Besides the familiar slogans such as *adat bersendikan syariat* [Shariah-based *adat*]" and "*kebudayaan Bali bersumber dari agama Hindu* [Balinese culture is rooted in Hinduism],"<sup>21</sup> religious consciousness cannot be divided into the dichotomy between Hadramaut Islam and local Islam, or Indian Hinduism and Balinese Hinduism, for

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<sup>18</sup> Pamela Allen and Carmencita Palermo, "Ajeng Bali: Multiple Meanings, Diverse Agendas," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 33, no. 97 (November 1, 2005): 239–55, doi:10.1080/13639810500449115.

<sup>19</sup> Putu Setia in Michel Picard, "From *Kebalian* to *Ajeng Bali*: Tourism and Balinese Identity in the Aftermath of the Kuta Bombing," in *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, ed. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T King, and Mike Parnwell (Nias Press, 2009), 125.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

religious consciousness emerges through pious practices. At this point, I argue that the antagonistic relationship projected by discursive *adat* reveals its own contradictions in its political visions.

*Adat* is not a secular mode of life. It will collapse if the *adat* community is not pious anymore since the foundation of normative and regulatory *adat* is religious. While we recognize *adat* as a legal system, often called *adat* law or customary law, in which obedience to *adat* is enforced through legal institutions, *adat* in everyday practices is enforced through conscience, honor, and humility. The languages of norms are local for they are bound to the local authorities of counsel. Those figures of counsel are often depicted for their piety and religiosity, and the texts and stories of counsel are often considered sacred. Piety is the precondition of obedience to *adat* and the identity marker of *adat* communities.

## 6. Pomp

Even though I find it problematic, to relate *adat* with pomp has been predominant in the discussion on *adat*. *Adat* authority and institution, as we find in Geertz, is based on pomp. Bali and Toraja might be good examples. The notions of excess and eroticism are prioritized in this context. With the poetic energy of pomp, the charisma of the performers evolves and is sustained.<sup>22</sup> But, it should be noted that pomp is not only the site of mystification but also signification; it is a source as well as production of meanings. In this context I suggest that the meanings must be situated in the rhetorical context, in the relation among the performers, the patrons, and the audience.

By claiming that culture is not power but contextualization,<sup>23</sup> Geertz fails to address how meanings are managed and controlled. The narrative of power that Geertz tells us is ceremonious and celebratory. His assertion that "Power served pomp, not pomp power,"<sup>24</sup> invites skepticism for the boundary between power and pomp is not clear. Yet, Geertz's interpretation of power in the classical Balinese will be useful to capture the rhetoric of power the elites propagate, but we need to find somewhere else when it comes to *adat*, for *adat* is not merely an expression of power and authority, but also aesthetic, morality, norm, and, more importantly, it is the voice of the oppressed - the peasants.

### C. The Textual and Living *Bissu*

*Bissu* might sound like a Bugis-Makassar term, but there is a feeling among the Bugis-Makassar people that the term is not "really" a Bugis word. In their translation of a collection of Makassar *lontarak* entitled, *Sedjarah Goa* (the History of Goa), Wolhoff and Abdurrahim mention *biksu* (Buddhist monk) as one of proper translations for the Makassar terms of *bissuja*, *bissuaia* or *bissua*.<sup>25</sup> Christian Pelras assumes that the Bugis people pick up the term from the Sumatran Buddhist traders, in the time of the reign of Srivijaya, in the 17th century. Two pieces of evidence that Pelras points out to support his assumption. First, the presence of similar artifacts such as gold, iron, copper, sandalwood, tortoiseshell, and raisin that indicate Srivijaya

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<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> G. J. Wolhoff and Abdurrahim., *Sedjarah Goa [The history of Goa]* (Makassar: Jajasan Kebudayaan Sulawesi - Selatan & Tenggara, 1900), 47-48.

and South Sulawesi had economic relationship.<sup>26</sup> Second, the similarities between the Buddhist Tantrism and *bissu* ritual such as ritual technique for facilitating trance by “producing a continuous high and sharp noise . . . by rubbing a finger round the edge of a ceramic bowl.” Yet, there are some among local scholars who claim that *bissu* is a Bugis term derived from *bessi* or *mabessi*. It means clean, holy. Angkong Petta Rala (a royal descendent), in his interview with Lathief, states that “*bissu* do not bleed, do not have breasts and menstruation, therefore they are clean or holy.”<sup>27</sup> In his observation, Lathief also indicates that this understanding is generally accepted by the villagers. It is not obvious from Lathief’s observation of how Rala and the villagers come to this perception, but what implies from the Rala’s statement is that menstruation is conceived to be profane, dirty, impure. I find no evidence in Lathief’s discussion that this notion is rooted in the pre-Islamic Bugis traditions, but what is obvious is that in Islam, women who have their period are not obliged to perform Islamic rituals, since they are considered impure during menstruation.

The current understanding of *bissu* as Bugis transgendered priests may be traced back in 1545, the year Antoni de Paiva, a Portuguese tradesman, wrote his letter a letter to King John III of Portugal.<sup>28</sup> In the letter, he mentions *bicos*, the transgender priests in the palace of Siang, currently the Pangkep regency.<sup>29</sup> Although de Paiva describes with contempt the *bicos* and their transgender practices, his account is useful for it shows that the transgender priests in Bugis culture exist and have a noble position in the 16th century.

B. F. Matthes, who conducted research in Sulawesi from 19<sup>th</sup> century, writes that the *bissu* are impotent, and compare *bissu* with *basir* and *balian* in Borneo.<sup>30</sup> This means that they have no capacity to engage in sexual acts, yet we find in Matthes’s information that those who engage in sexual relationship will be punished by drowning to death,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that they have potential to engage in sexual relationship. Matthes does not explain further about the *bissu*’s sexuality, and admits that what he is willing to accept as a fact is that they are men who attire in female dress. This is because his connection with the *bissu* is related to his missionary project: the Bible translation, and Matthes decide to use the *bissu*’s ritual language (*basa bissu*) as the standard local language in South Sulawesi to translate the Bible, which was the main reason why he was sent by Dutch Bible Society to conduct research on local languages in South Sulawesi.<sup>32</sup> Chabot, followed Matthes, conducted his field research on adat (customary law) in South

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<sup>26</sup> O. W. Wolters, “‘Jottings’: a Few and Miscellaneous Pi-chi Jottings on Early Indonesia,” *Indonesia* 36 (1983): 59  
Christian Pelras, *The Bugis* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 71.

<sup>27</sup> Halilintar Lathief, “*Bissu*: Imam-Imam Yang Menghibur [*Bissu*: Entertaining Priests],” in *La Galigo: Menelusuri Jejak Warisan Sastra Dunia [La Galigo: Tracing the Heritage of the World Literature]*, ed. Nurhayati Rahman, Hukma, Anil, and Idwar, Cet. 1 (Makassar, Indonesia: Pusat Studi La Galigo, Divisi Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora, Pusat Kegiatan Penelitian, Universitas Hasanuddin [dan] Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Barru, 2003), 522.

<sup>28</sup> Hubert Jacobs, *The First Locally Demonstrable Christianity in Celebes, 1544* (Portugal: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1966), 290.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> B. F. Matthes, *Over de Bissoe’s of Heidensche Priesters En Priesteressen Der Boeginezen [About the Bissoe or the Pagan Priests and Priestesses of the Boegis]* (Amsterdam : Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1872),

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Adriaan Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (BRILL, 2008).

Sulawesi from 1936 to 1949 on gender and kinship finds that some of those who perform *bissu* rituals are married men.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, it is hard to find the traditional Bugis-Makassar texts (*lontarak*) that explicitly mention that the *bissu* are transgender. Abdoerrahim, a local scholar who collected data during the late Dutch colonization and the early independence of Indonesia, never writes about the gender and sexual orientation of the *bissu*. He writes more on the role of the *bissu* as an informant of sacred places and speakers of *basa bissu* (*bissu* ritual language).<sup>34</sup> In his report in August 15, 1948, he writes the inauguration of the *bissu* in a traditional market in Timbusang, a village in Bungoro, Pangkep. He is informed from the new leader of the *bissu* that he has no reason to reject the leadership, since he is appointed by the government, royal families, and people. Abdoerrahim in his report writes that the *bissu* was inaugurated in a traditional market. The government representation states:

*mereka lihat sekarang ini jang berpakaian kebesaran and bersongko' poetih itoelah sekarang mendjadi dan dipilih mendjadi P. Matoa, jang diserahi mengasoeh aradjang.* [Who you are seeing now, wearing a royal costume and white cap, he or she is the Puang Matoa (the leader of the *bissu*), whose responsible for guarding royal regalia [Translation is mine]].<sup>35</sup>

The statement is repeated three times, followed by the applause and cheer from the crowds. This statement is similar to the inauguration of the *bissu* in 2001, in Segeri, Pangkep.

In his article, “Ringmuur van hat oude Goa” presented to the students of teacher-training school in June 16, 1951, Abdoerrahim writes that the role of the *bissu* are to enthrone kings and to perform the ritual bathing for the death squads.<sup>36</sup> The well located in the grave complex of Bugis-Makassar kings is called *bungung bissua* (*bissu's well*), which Abdoerrahim calls *bungung barania* (the well of the brave). And, the leadership of the *bissu* is entitled *Daenta Laikaja*, different from the current title of the *bissu*: *puang matoa*.<sup>37</sup>

In another traditional Bugis text, we find a *bissu* with title *Karaenga ri Bissuja*. This title is given to Karange ri Batu-Batu, a wife of Tunidjallo, the king of Goa (1565 – 1590). While we find no information why and how she becomes a *bissu*, it seems it is related to her inability to bear children and her role as the prince maid kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

In Rhoda Grauer’s documentary film, *The Last Bissu: the Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*, one of the *bissu* Saidi invited to attend their inauguration as a new leader of the *bissu* in 2001 was a male *bissu* named Made.<sup>39</sup> From my interview with *Bissu Nika*, they acknowledge that among the *bissu* in Pangkep, there are female *bissu* called *bissu pance* (*pance*, which means low in Bugis, indicates their rank) and *maujangka* (heterosexual men – they often have wives – but behave like transgender people who also participate in *bissu* rituals).

The texts of *I La Galigo* (the traditional Bugis texts collected and transcribed in 19<sup>th</sup> century) often cited to approve the existence of the transgender *bissu* do not also mention

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<sup>33</sup> Chabot, *Kinship, Status and Gender in South Celebes*, 194.

<sup>34</sup> Abdoerrahim, “Perkoendjoengan Ke Djota [Visit to Djota]” (Leiden, 1948), KITLV.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Abdoerrahim, ““Ringmuur van Het Oude Goa’ Gehouden Voor Leerlingen van de Sekolah Guru Negara [the Old Fort of Goa, an Article Presented for the Students of the Public Teacher Training School in 1948]” January 16, 1951, 6–7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Wolhoff and Abdurrahim., *Sedjarah Goa [The history of Goa]*, 47–48.

<sup>39</sup> Rhoda Grauer, *The Last Bissu: The Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*, Documentary, (2003).



explicitly the *bissu*'s transgender practices. Muhammad Salim, a prolific Bugis scholar who translates the *I La Galigo* texts during my interview with him, argues that the texts do not mention explicitly the transgender identity of the *bissu* since it is not necessary. "Everybody knows that the *bissu* are transgender," he says. Salim's argument might be acceptable among the Bugis-Makassar people and Indonesians as in Bugis-Makassar and Indonesian languages, pronouns are not gendered, and the way to identify the genders of the subjects are through face-to-face interactions – some names are easily identified as man or woman but using name to identify a gender of a speaker is not accurate. But, it contradicts what I read from the texts. The highest *bissu* priests the texts are royal women: Tenriabeng (twin sister of the Diving King, Sawerigading) and Tenridio (Sawerigading's daughter).

From my interview with *Bissu Nika*, they acknowledge that among the *bissu* in Pangkep, there are female *bissu* called *bissu pance* (*pance*, which means low in Bugis, indicates their rank, women are considered to have low rank in the *bissu* hierarchy) and *maujangka* (heterosexual men - they often have wives - but behave like transgender people who also participate in *bissu* rituals).

Moreover, during my field research I find that *Wa'* and *Ma'*, the titles used by local people to address *bissu*, do not specifically refer to transgender subjects. *Wa'* is used to address transgender and male *bissu*, and *Ma'* female *bissu*.

## Chapter Two

### Tradition of the Living and the Dead

#### A. Spirit of Tradition

I came to the *bissu* as a researcher but I found my position odd among them. They asked me to perform *mangolo*, the ritual that also is performed for those who come to the *bissu* as patients to ask permission from spirits to perform blessing and healing. As I was wondering whether or not the *bissu* received a researcher in the same way as a patient, the *bissu* told me that the stories they would tell me were not only theirs, but also their ancestors'. The permission I sought came from not only from them but also from the spirits of their ancestors. The traditions I observed were of the living and the dead, they told me. "We don't need the paper," a young *bissu* told me, seeing me holding the letter of consent. After the performance of the *mangolo*, an old *bissu* told me, "Since you become *to makkasiang* (a servant) for the spirits, you have to tell truth for us, the spirits, and for your own sake." I had realized that even though we used the same term, the *bissu* and I had a different understanding on what tradition was. My understanding is simple, based on the common understanding and my readings, that tradition is a way of life rooted in the values or practices passed down through many generations. "Way of life" is always the underlined keyword in the definition of tradition. For the *bissu*, tradition is a moral mechanism that bounds together the living and the dead. It regulates interactions among living individuals and between living individuals and spirits. In their absence as living bodies, the spirits manifest in the forms of traditional regalia and live among their living fellows. The *bissu* believe it is tradition that regulates the social life of the community before they embrace Islam. In this sense, tradition is the religion that the *bissu* embrace before Islam. Among the *bissu*, we find this common view on the relationship between tradition (*adat*) and religion, "tradition (*adat*) exists before religion, but it follows religion."

The scholars of critical theory attempts to salvage the spiritual element of culture by juxtaposing culture to art, for art, as Marcuse argues in "The Affirmative Character of Culture", is the only way that we can trace the reminiscence of spirituality in our modern secular world.<sup>40</sup> It is the culture, as Marcuse points out, that Herder talks about, and it is culture in the mind of the state leaders as they speak to the heart among their fellow citizens.<sup>41</sup> Culture in this sense is culture that moves a society to an ideal – moral – life, not fantasy and utopia. "Culture" as a moral imperative, Marcuse contends, "belongs not to him who comprehends the truths of humanity as a battle cry, but to him in whom they have become a posture which leads to a mode of proper behavior: exhibiting harmony and reflectiveness even in daily routine. . . . Culture speaks of the dignity of 'man' without concerning itself with a concretely more dignified status for men."<sup>42</sup> It is through the culture of the soul, Marcuse asserts, we find the voices of "humanity, goodness, joy, truth, and solidarity."<sup>43</sup> I find this element of culture central in the *bissu*'s understanding of *adat*. When the *bissu* say, "a lot of people today do not have *adat*!"

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<sup>40</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009., 2009), 65–98.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–77, 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

They mean the people do not behave based on the accepted moral values, they show no dignity. They often identify the people as *rupa tau* (human face): a person who has a human face but behave not as a human being.

We the moderns, to echo what Marcuse writes, never forget and try hard, to speak to the heart, to speak with sentiment and emotion. Among us, politicians might be an obvious, or bad, example. We talk about how tradition – culture – inspires us to move forward. We talk about how values matter in our modern life. We place the pursuit of happiness above wealth accumulation. We restrain ourselves from speaking in a vulgar way, at least on television, because we feel ashamed when our children watch. Why do we do all of these? The answer I think is located not in the brain but in the heart. It is the tradition – culture – that we discuss in this section.

Tradition must be preserved! There is a sense of urgency as if tradition is something that is easily gone and fragile. But, what we mean by tradition? Is this a moral mechanism, the work of heart that makes us guilty when we do something wrong, or is it only something that is obsolete and nostalgic life that our generation has passed and forgotten? We build many statues under the name of tradition. We feel we never do such heroic actions the monument figures do. It is beyond our capacity as a human being. They might be prophets, semi-divine beings, or divine manifestations. They are too far from a human being. Our desire, effort to preserve culture is nostalgic without human spirit; our story is of heroism without humanity; our history is a fairy tale we tell our children on their bed, the stories that make them sleep.

Once, a young *bissu* told me, “when a community survives, tradition will survive.” It might be very simple answer to my question how tradition will survive, but it makes me pause and think as in my research I focus on the tradition, not the community. How many of us who walk in the museum, enchanted by the beautiful artifacts but we remain ignorant to the workers who made them, the sufferings and violence they endure. The young *bissu* does not feel burden with the authenticity and preservation of tradition, but they feel the urgency to protect the community, to make sure the community survive. A Tradition is not an objectified thing; the community embodies it. To preserve a community means to the *bissu* is to preserve a tradition. Tradition is not a world to escape reality but a guide to the right path. Through tradition, the *bissu* know when life betrays them, when life goes wrong. It is the spirit of life itself. It is the spirit that moves the community to the future. Tradition spreads its legs wide, one of them stands on a grave, to give birth to ethical life, the life that belongs to life and death. Death itself manifests in social festivity not to celebrate death but life. It regulates the cycle of life, the social, and to guarantee that human beings do not lose their humanity.

## **B. Seductive Tradition**

How does the tradition bind the living and the dead? Is it through the work of power? The *bissu* and the scholars of critical theory give us the same answer: seduction. Seduction, for the *bissu*, is divine manifestations; they bound human beings in their primal instinct that makes them human. It is the dance, as *Haji Zainuddin Gandaria* tells us in the *Last Bissu*, the *bissu* perform that seduces *To Manurung* (First Man) to descend from the upper world. Yet, it is the loneliness irks him to inhabit the middle world.

“Who will entertain me?” *To Manurung* asks.

“We, the *bissu*,” the *bissu* say.

Hearing this, *To Manurung* decides to stay and build his kingdom on earth. It is the seduction of the dance and entertainment that binds *To Manurung* and the *bissu*, the spirits and human beings.

“Seduction is the heart of everything we do,” *Bissu Nika* told me. The *bissu* chant when they put makeup on the bride and bridegroom to make them look beautiful, when they perform *ma’giri* (kris dance ritual) to gather a large crowd, Nika explained. Seduction the *bissu* understands is not to give illusion but it is combination of the work of the body and the works of soul, it represents reality in its beautiful form. And, the aim of this beautiful is not charming itself, but the beauty is to serve humanity.

Seduction is not a word that we want to hear in our debate on culture; it remains taboo in our civilized academic discourse, as Baudrillard points out,

Seduction continues to appear to all orthodoxies as malefice and artifice, a black magic for the deviation of all truths, an exaltation of the malicious use of signs, a conspiracy of signs. Every discourse is threatened with this sudden reversibility, absorbed into its own signs without a trace of meaning. This is why all disciplines, which have as an axiom the coherence and finality of their discourse, must try to exorcize it.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, it is seduction, Baudrillard argues, is the center where culture gravitates.<sup>45</sup> Seduction "never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice - never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals."<sup>46</sup> Seduction, as we follow Baudrillard, "serves not to establish a nature and uncover its law, but to - set up appearances and organize their cycle."<sup>47</sup> It is the entrance to the metaphysical: simulation. Referring to Antonin Artaud’s notion of the metaphysical, Baudrillard asserts:

For nothing exists naturally, things exist because challenged, and because summoned to respond to that challenge. It is by being challenged that the powers of the world, including the gods, are aroused; it is by challenging these powers that they are exorcized, seduced and captured; it is by the challenge that the game and its rules are resurrected. All this requires an artificial bluffing, that it to say, a systematic simulation -that troubles itself with neither a preestablished state of the world nor bodily anatomy. A radical metaphysics of simulation, it needs not even concern itself with "natural" harmony."<sup>48</sup>

Our interpretive task then, as Greenblatt suggests, is to look into "[the] capacity [tradition] to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder."<sup>49</sup>

At this point, what we seek in tradition is a certain mode of sensory and ethical practices embodied in a community. For artists, these practices that we have to recuperate, presenting arts in their capacity to incite desire, pleasure, or all the modes of sensory experiences embedded in morality and knowledge. When Artaud describes the Balinese dance, he does not describe the meanings but how the dance changes him, inspires him to think of theater in a different way. Artaud’s vision of the Balinese dance – or theater in his word – becomes a critical point to the contemporary media representations and academic interpretations of tradition and indigenous

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<sup>44</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (University of California Press, 1988), 6.

communities. Artaud's interpretation of the Balinese dance demonstrates that in its circulation, a tradition still embodies a spirit of its community; it seduces and transforms him.

### **C. From Heart onto Paper**

How should we discuss a community and their tradition? How, through interpretation, do we see the vision of tradition that orients the community to an ethical life? The answers to these questions might be illuminated as the debate on culture shifts from the classic anthropological to aesthetic notion of culture. In the previous discussion, we explore the critiques for the limitation of culture to investigate the moral – the aesthetic and spiritual - content of culture. In the following discussion, we move to the struggles among scholars to understand culture as a form of identity and the epistemic and ethical ground in which our contemporary debate on performance, race and culture takes place.

#### **1. Performance Theory**

How traditions as performance arts change the way we approach culture? Since Victor Turner's promotion of anthropology of performance, research on performance is oriented towards uncovering and explaining performance among peasants settled outside of the North American and European countries. With the performative turn in anthropology, it is difficult to maintain that culture is uniquely local and authentic, since everything cultural has then been seen as "made up", and the focus then has shifted from the debate on authenticity and locality to the so-called cultural fabrications in which the ethnographers look into the dynamic and changes of cultural practices. Performances in this context of analysis serve as "the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world."<sup>50</sup>

It means that we move from the meanings of culture to direction of culture, from authenticity and configuration of tradition from locality to global circulation, from fixity to changes. Nonetheless, I find research on indigenous people and traditions remain unchanged. It is still trapped on the old-fashioned debate on culture and meanings. It remains stuck in the classical interpretations and abstraction of concepts rather than the agency and creativity of indigenous people in framing and positioning outsiders vis-à-vis themselves. While those who performed, are seen, are vulnerable as spectators cast gaze upon them and subject to misrepresentation and misinterpretation, but they have agency and capacity to transform the others, to seduce their spectators, to change their spectators' sensuous practices, and to experiment and innovate.

The politics of tradition have been maintained through the interactions with outsiders, but at this point, we find irony in which traditions appear to be placed in the past to have contemporary social relevance as a critique against modernization and globalization, projecting an image that tradition is a mode of escapism. And in our own inquiry into the complexity of tradition, we find ourselves to experiment with terms and practices which at the outset we do not know where they lead us to. Clifford argues, "Ethnography . . . presupposes a constant willingness to be surprised, to unmake interpretive syntheses, and to value - when it comes - the

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<sup>50</sup> Dwight Gonquergood, "Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1989): 83.

unclassified, unsought other."<sup>51</sup> In many cases, in our comparative analysis, through translation and conflating indigenous performance and ontological models, we lose the moral texture and sentiment of the indigenous performances.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. Theory of Race

In *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel argues that the Master's consciousness is unessential, since the object of the consciousness depends upon the Slave's works.<sup>53</sup> The Master's consciousness is of thinghood.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, "his truth is rather the unessential consciousness, and the fortuitous unessential action of that consciousness."<sup>55</sup> The slave does not need recognition; "in fact has in itself this truth of [or revealed reality] of pure negating-negativity and of *Being-for-itself*. For it has *experienced* this essential-reality within itself."<sup>56</sup>

In her reading on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Judith Butler comes to an argument: "The paradox of subjection implies a paradox of referentiality" since "we must refer to what does not yet exist."<sup>57</sup> She argues that subject is "trope", it is, Butler refers to Foucault, "not 'spoken'".<sup>58</sup> And, "conscience", she asserts, "is the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself, establishing as reflective and reflexive." Reflexivity in Butler's account moves the subject from "self-punishment" to "self-knowing."<sup>59</sup> Based on Butler's argument, we find that the concepts of race that we employ to explain racism either they are insufficient to contain racial subjectivity when the concepts we deploy are derived from the elites that have no capacity to reflex on their experiences of race, or they remain in imaginary realms.

Another explanation we can find in the theory of prejudice. According to the theory of prejudice, Michel Wieviorka argues, the analysis of race is no longer aimed at explaining the real events of racism, but the affects of the interactions, how prevalent racial attitudes constitute racial subjectivities and the inferiority complex of racial subjects.<sup>60</sup> While maintaining their focus on the racist actors, the masters, the theory of prejudice is not aimed at promoting the Master subjectivity, but to explain "a system of action" in which racial prejudices emerge.<sup>61</sup> Racism, for the theorists of prejudice, "comes to be seen as the incapacity of some people to manage difference, but also their incapacity to cope with the resemblance with the Other, the foreigner and also, women."<sup>62</sup> This form of racism is grounded on the view of the Other, which is common among the psychoanalysts, that our attitudes towards the Other "[produces]

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<sup>51</sup> James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism - Cambridge Journals Online," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 564.

<sup>52</sup> Felicia Hughes-Freeland, ed., *Ritual, Performance, Media* (Routledge, 2003), 11.

<sup>53</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (Dover Publications, 2012), 68.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>56</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. Raymond Queneau (Cornell University Press, 1980), 21.

<sup>57</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Michel Wieviorka, *The Arena of Racism, Theory, Culture & Society* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1995), 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

animosity and irritation."<sup>63</sup> Yet, in reality, our animosity and irritation, Wieviorka contends, are not but our own consciousness, our fear of death.<sup>64</sup> At this point, we cannot but accept Wieviorka's argument: "racism no longer has anything to do with race, nor even with the characteristics of those against whom it is targeted; it is naturalized, lurking deep in the unconscious or identified with that unconscious in what tends to be a de-socializing perspective."<sup>65</sup>

The consequence of this racial sedimentation can be observed in the racial subjects' incapability to "interiorize" and articulate their racial identity.<sup>66</sup> This is a symptom of the alienation of the masses in the "the theory-building of academic racism" that demands further investigation.<sup>67</sup> The elitist theories of race are built from a presumption that "the 'knowledge' sought and desired by the masses is an elementary knowledge which simply justifies them in their spontaneous feelings of brings them back to the truth of their instincts."<sup>68</sup>

We find the place of Edward Said's *Orientalism* within this debate. The Orient, Said argues, is a hidden desire of the Occident. The factuality of the Orient is not a problem that Said attempts to explain, since the Orient is not but a mirror image of the Occident. In the Orient, Said suggests, we can excavate the occidental desire and fantasy.<sup>69</sup> In the Orient, we can observe the ontological and epistemic structure as well as the limit of the morality of the Occident, as Said writes, "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe."<sup>70</sup>

Hence, our analysis of racial representations, as Roland Barthes suggests, should be aimed at investigating "the very intention of behavior".<sup>71</sup> In Barthes's example of a Black-French soldier giving a salute to the French flag, we do not deal only with the reality of the action, but we have to explicate the relation between "a Negro in uniform" as a gesture that hides the history of French imperialism and racism.<sup>72</sup> The mythical concept that Barthes lays out in his discussions on popular culture is related to a certain kind of subjective consciousness, the petit-bourgeois consciousness in which "the Other threatens to appear in full view, become mirrors . . . a scandal which threatens [the petit-bourgeois] essence."<sup>73</sup> In Barthes's concept of the mythical, "The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home."<sup>74</sup> For scholars of (post) colonial studies, it thus becomes even more necessary to attend to Ann Stoler's interpretive strategy, "engagement with the colonial archives should be devoted to the reading of 'upper class sources upside down' in order to reveal the language of rule and the biases inherent in statist

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>66</sup> Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>69</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>71</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 118.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 153.

perceptions."<sup>75</sup> In this type of critical engagement, "sex and sentiment" are not merely "metaphors of empire," but become "its constitutive elements."<sup>76</sup> Further, as Said suggests, what we need to engage are not merely assessments of the validity of the representation but rather the "style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances" of the figures that emerge from the colonial archive<sup>77</sup> On this line of argument, we find that the debate shifts from who is the (racialized) other, to how the (racialized) other is constructed. Since we deal with exteriority of the other, we deal with a technique of representation as a means of controlling and policing others. Emerging from this scholarship are docile (racial, cultural) subjects.

Yet, it should not end at that point, if we believe in the potentials of rupture, subversion, and negotiation in the projects of representations. The relationship between interpretive communities and traditional communities I imagine is like the puppet masters and their puppets: it is not about who controls whom, but who becomes whom. Let me bring back the *Suluk Gatoloco*, as it articulates beautifully the dialectical relationship:

The puppeteer beneath the lamp  
Can now select, can now reject  
Each wayang puppet in its turn  
By weighing them reflectively.  
And then he sets one forth  
Whose form is called 'the one-who-yearns.'  
What makes this possible  
Is the bright blencong [oil lamp]'s blaze on high;  
I think, therefore, the lamp is older than the rest.  
Now when the gamelan resounds,  
It's for the wayang that is played.  
The dalang [puppeteer] speaks, but yet his words  
To Ki Wayang belong, not to him.  
The players great and small  
Obey the dalang's will, from slow  
To rapid tempo, turn and turn  
About. The dalang rules indeed,  
Yet he does merely move the puppets, speaks their words.<sup>78</sup>

In our writing, our notion of giving voice suggests the same logic. The concepts we invent surprise us; the characters we create behave beyond our control. Suddenly we feel our writing belongs not to us, but to those we write about and to those, we imagine, will read. As we fill a blank page with words, we begin a battle, a battle of voice. And, only one of those voices belongs to us, often the voice we hear at the beginning and at the end of the story. The voice we are so confident to claim as if we are God, we who create the beginning and the end of the world. I wonder why writers in traditional Malay texts never claim the authorship of their writings.

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<sup>75</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science*, no. 2 (2002): 99.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>77</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Benedict Anderson, "The Suluk Gatoloco: Part One," *Indonesia* 32 (October 1, 1981): 135, doi:10.2307/3350858.



#### D. Speak Dutch to Us: Race and Class in the East Indies

Having laid out the understandings of culture and theories of culture and race, I would like to place the implementations of the theories in the Indonesian context. This will allow us to figure out the racial assemblage, to borrow Alexander Weheliye's term,<sup>79</sup> relevant to our discussion on the *bissu*. The racial assemblage I try to identify in this discussion is located at the intersection of language, social class, religion, and gender. This discussion is necessary to specify the distinct context of racism I refer to, the racism that operates beyond skin color. It is relevant since the *bissu* identity configuration is constituted through language and social class, that the *bissu* speak *basa bissu* (*bissu* language) or *basa torilangi* (the language of heaven) and claim to belong to white blood (royal family).

At the turn of the 20th century, the Dutch government of the East Indies implemented the "ethical policy", marking the beginning of the civilizing mission in the colony. It is in this transition that our authors in this section attempt to capture the momentum that they expected would change life in the colony. In their narratives, we find racial and class sentiments that segregate the heterogeneous populations of the Indies. We learn from them that at the core of the Dutch colonial racialization lies the upper class-White European. These elitist sensibilities are the site of tension, anxiety, and vulnerability determinant of the colonial racial segregation. The common narrative of racial segregation they theatricalize is the struggle of the Dutch to maintain the purity of their White European culture. In the implementation of the ethical policy, we find the obvious racialization of the colonial population through a racialized classification: the upper- and middle-class Dutch, the poor Dutch, the mixed race (Eurasian or *Indos* in the local vernacular term), native aristocrat (*priyayi*), lower-class native, Muslims, and women.

Raden Adjeng Kartini, a progressive and liberal *priyayi* widely known as the first Indonesian feminist, in her letter written in 1900 to Stella Zeehandelaar, her Dutch friend, writes:

In many subtle ways [the Hollanders] make us feel their dislike. "I am a European, you are a Javanese," they seem to say, or "I am the master, you the governed." Not once, but many times, they speak to us in broken Malay; although they know very well that we understand the Dutch language. . . . Not long ago, a Raden Aju was talking to a gentleman, and impulsively she said, "Sir, excuse me, but may I make a friendly request, please, speak to me in your own language. I understand and speak Malay very well, but alas, only high Malay. I do not understand this *pasar* Malay."

Why do many Hollanders find it unpleasant to converse with us in their own language? Oh yes, now I understand; Dutch is too beautiful to be spoken by a brown mouth.<sup>80</sup>

The semantic aspect of the languages we learn from Kartini is less important than the class differences they invoke. Dutch language delineates the bourgeois classes: the Dutch and the native aristocrats, high Malay native aristocrats, and *pasar* (low) Malay for

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<sup>79</sup> Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Kartini, *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, ed. Hildred Geertz (Lanham : New York: University Press of America ; Asia Society, 1985), 61.

uneducated natives - *pasar* (traditional market) is used to represent the lower class native since *pasar* is associated with ugliness, poverty and illiteracy.

How the class sentiment of the languages vanishes is not clear, but suffices to say here that the officialization – nationalization - of the Malay language was made possible by the emergence of print-capitalism, as Benedict Anderson has argued.<sup>81</sup> It was the language of printed media owned mainly by the Chinese and Eurasians.<sup>82</sup> In 1928, through what is known as *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge), Malay was proclaimed as the Indonesian national language: “We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, honor the language of unity, Indonesian.”

In an essay published in an independent Indonesian journal *Pujangga Baru* (New Poet) in August 1935, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, the eminent Indonesian poet, states that the Indonesian consciousness is not rooted in the pre-Indonesian period, what he calls the *jahiliah* age (the age of ignorance).<sup>83</sup> Rather, it is a new consciousness emerging among the young generations, free from racism.<sup>84</sup> In Alisyahbana's idealistic view, the emergent national consciousness requires the erasure of memory and history of race and class in the East Indies. In search of a middle path, and to resolve racial and class tensions among the native population, he persuasively invokes the notion of a nationalism that is tied to the young generation, the future-oriented generation.<sup>85</sup> He is more concerned with what he calls *provincialisme* (provincialism), which I think of as a euphemistic form of racism, which he sees as the main obstacle of for the emergence of the new Indonesian national consciousness as an obvious and latent threat to the unity and independence of Indonesia.<sup>86</sup> It raises our curiosity as to why Alisyahbana is more concerned with the tension between the Javanese and the Malay than with the tensions between the 'Indonesians' and the Dutch.<sup>87</sup> The new national consciousness, Alisyahbana asserts, emerge as a result of Western influence, therefore the culture born from that consciousness must accumulate Western values: rationalism, materialism, and individualism, while maintaining Eastern values of spiritualism and communalism.<sup>88</sup>

The dichotomy between the spiritual, mythical East and the rational West is not new. A good example is found in *The Hidden Force*, the historical novel by Louis Couperus, partly based on his life in the East Indies from March 1899 to February 1900. In an introduction to the English translation of the Dutch novel, E. M. Beekman states that "The town of Labuwangi in *The Hidden Force* is a fairly accurate re-creation of Pasuruan [a city in East Java]". The supernaturalism - mysticism - is predominant but, it is not the main theme of the novel. The supernatural events in the novel are alleged to be the real events occurring in 1831 in the house of Assistant Resident Van Kessinger, as we learn from an official document in Sumedang, a city

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<sup>81</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, New Edition*, Revised (Verso, 2006), 135.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Achdiat K. Mihardja, ed., *Polemik Kebudayaan: Pokok Pikiran St. Takdir Alisjahbana, Sanusi Pane, Dr. Poerbatjaraka, Dr. Sutomo, Tjindarbuni, Adinegoro, Dr. M. Amir, Ki Hajar Dewantara [Polemik of Culture: Ideas of Takdir Alisjahbana, Sanusi Pane, Dr. Poerbatjaraka, Dr. Sutomo, Tjindarbuni, Adinegoro, Dr. M. Amir, Ki Hajar Dewantara]*, Cet. 3 (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1977), 17.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–21.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 25.

in West java. For some critics, Couperus's inaccurate description of the events indicates an ignorance of Javanese culture.<sup>89</sup>

Van Oudijck, the character that may gain our empathy, was born to the poor Dutch parents and had to learn that life is tough. It is education that allows him to occupy the high position of Regent in the Dutch colonial administration. Rational and simple, he rejects any form of superstition. He shared his fellow Dutch's disdain of mixed races, but apparently loved his Indo wife, Nona, who gave him two children, Theo and Doddy. Leonie, Van Oudijck's second wife, is a beautiful Dutch woman born in Java, but "she is more Indies than Dutch".<sup>90</sup> In the novel we find a Freudian type of narrative in which sexual drive and fear of death become the main catalyst of social and individual transformations. It is the sexual scandal between Theo, Oudijck's son and Leoni, his stepmother, and the potential for miscegenation instigated by Leoni's desire for a mixed-race Addy man, that coincide with supernatural incidents happening in Labuwangi. Besides the trouble in his family, which remains unknown to him, Van Oudijck is engaged in a conflict of wills with Sunario, the native regent, a son of a Javanese princess, whom Van Oudijck describes as a "silent, spiteful, secretive fanatical *wajang* [wayang] puppet, with his reputation as a saint and sorcerer, stupidly idolized by the people in whose welfare he took no interest and who adored him only for the glamour of his ancient name."<sup>91</sup> Yet, his tone becomes empathetic when Van Oudijck describes to us the regent of D\_\_\_, another native regent: "a cultivated man who spoke and wrote Dutch fluently, contributing lucid Dutch articles to newspapers and magazines."<sup>92</sup> The regent of D\_\_\_ with his fluency in Dutch is a manifestation of an enlightened native aristocrat who undergoes cultural transformation and becomes a rational person.

Besides the affairs and the conflicts among the races and the classes, the novel also offers us the tension between culture and nature. We find that the Dutch, in their struggle to maintain their culture, have to suffer since their culture does not fit within the tropical nature of the Indies. Eva Eldersma, a Dutch woman who has been two year in the East Indies accompanied his husband, a Dutch officer, find herself in an awkward situation to maintain her Dutch outlook. In the servants, Eva finds harmony between culture and nature, and she envies the energy it creates as she observes how the servants move and work. She feels desperate, but it is her principle, her spirit to maintain her racial and class outlook that deters her from adopting the native life style. Reading from the colonial archives in the 19th century, Stoler tells us a similar story from a different angle, where the native servants are the potential sources of transgression of the racial and class boundaries in the middle and upper class white Europeans' households.<sup>93</sup>

That Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country raises questions about where the Muslims are in the literatures we have engaged so far. The answer is related to the Dutch colonial policy to alienate Muslims. Islam is depicted as foreign and incompatible with the Indonesian nationalism and custom (*adat*). Let us observe the anti-Islam sentiment in the *Suluk Gatoloco*, a Javanese text of mysticism (in this discussion, I read the text translated by Benedict

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<sup>89</sup> Louis Couperus and E. M. Beekman, *The Hidden Force*, Library of the Indies (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 22.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006), 35.

Anderson),<sup>94</sup> and the Muslims' response to it.

"The heretical daydreams of an undoubtedly opium-besotted Javanese mystic!"<sup>95</sup> This statement comes not from a conservative Muslim but from a Dutch advisor on Native affairs, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. The comment appears in Hurgronje's essay published in 1883 on the *Suluk Gatoloco*. The title, *Gatoloco* by Anderson is translated as erecting penis or masturbation (*gato*: literally means penis in Anderson's translation or hidden thing - an alternative translation suggested by Sylvia Tiwon; and *loco* means to rub). The text is believed to have been considered sacred by the believers of Javanese mysticism, but is viewed by Muslims as a satire against Arab Islamic orthodoxy. In the *Suluk* - a genre of Javanese literature that contains Mystical and Sufi teachings - we find the conflicts between Javanese mysticism and Islamic Sufism and Shariah (Islamic law). When it first appeared in 1873, it did not receive much attention and did not provoke controversy. Its publication in 1889 among the Javanese in Surabaya also received little public attention. It is a different story when the passages from the *Suluk* were cited by Djodjodiroro in his essay published on the *Djawi Hiswara* on January 11, 1918. The Muslims in Java, Central and East Java in particular, organized a huge protest and demanded that the editor of *Djawi Hiswara*, Martodharsono, a teacher of Javanese mysticism, to be punished. Two reasons may be offered why the *Suluk* became controversial in that year, i.e., the emergence of enthusiastic readers of Indonesian and Javanese newspapers, and the rise of Islamism.<sup>96</sup>

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am not interested in the *Suluk* itself but rather in the racial sentiment it created between Muslims and Javanese. Under the heat of the *Djawi Hiswara* affair, the debate on nationalism among the Muslims, the educated lower-priyayi, and priyayi took place several months after the publication. It is important to remind ourselves at this point that this is the era before the official acceptance of Malay as the national language, and Dutch was the language used in the debate. In their contentious debate on *sama rata sama rasa* (equality and solidarity), a racial divide became unavoidable. Those who were sympathetic with Indies nationalism, mostly the Muslims and lower priyayi, attacked elitist Javanese culture and Western capitalism. On the other side, the Javanese, mostly those who were concerned with their Javanese heritage, contended that the Indies nationalism of Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union) did not have a cultural root among the citizens of the Indies. It was a negative consciousness predominated by anti-colonialism; hence as they asserted, it was trapped within the hegemonic Western narrative.<sup>97</sup> Yet, the main problem of democratization of the Javanese culture, an issue which emerged in the Congress of Javanese Cultural Development held in Solo from July 5 to 7, 1918, was the Javanese language. This problem created a significant divide among the priyayi.<sup>98</sup> Javanese language has two primary language levels, High Javanese (*krama*) spoken among the priyayi and which the lower classes must address the priyayi, and low Javanese (*ngoko*) used by the priyayi to address the lower classes and among the low caste of Javanese, the servants.<sup>99</sup> On

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<sup>94</sup> Anderson, "The Suluk Gatoloco."

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 110; Gerardus WJ Drewes, "The Struggle between Javanism and Islam as Illustrated by Serat Dermagandul," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde*, 1966, 315.

<sup>97</sup> Takashi Shiraishi, "The Disputes between Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soetatmo Soeriokoesoemo: Satria vs. Pandita," *Indonesia*, 1981, 96.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>99</sup> For further discussion on Javanese language and class, see Suzanne April Brenner, *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

the other side, the Javanese priyayi had to defend themselves from the criticism against their mythical thinking and hypocrisy, against the charge that they celebrated the high morality of Javanese mysticism but, dependent on the Dutch, they indulged in a luxurious lifestyle.<sup>100</sup>

At the end of this section, let us return to Kartini to see how “woman” was also expressed as a racial category in the East Indies. Kartini struggled to promote equality for women. In the Indies, most priyayi women were relegated to the domestic realm and educated only to inculcate in them the manners and etiquette necessary to manage their households. But Kartini was an exception, writing letters to her Dutch friends in Dutch. She explains how she learnt Dutch in her first letter written on May 25, 1899 to Stella Zeehandelaar:

I do not know the modern language. Alas! We girls are not allowed by our law to learn languages; it was a great innovation for us to learn Dutch. I long to know languages, not so much to be able to speak them, as for the far greater joy of being able to read the many beautiful works of foreign authors in their own tongue.<sup>101</sup>

Kartini, a priyayi and a daughter of Sosroningrat, a head of the Jepara regency (now a town in the province of Central Java) was not allowed to continue her education, not because of she was not priyayi enough, but because she was a woman. Kartini's concern with the education of women gained its momentum with the implementation of ethical value that encouraged education among the natives. And, Kartini's Dutch friends supported her ambition to pursue a higher education.<sup>102</sup>

Yet, we find ambiguity in Kartini's view on the West. Embracing Western liberalism, she remains loyal to her Javanese (elitist) traditions. The most interesting part in her letters to her Dutch friends, as Hildred Geertz in her introduction indicates, is her internal struggles, between the forces of tradition and modernity as parts of her own personality, between the pull of abstract ideas and the pressure of her affections for her family.<sup>103</sup> She experiences "a conflict of loyalties: to her historic destiny as she saw it, to her various - and contradictory - Dutch friends, and above all, to her father."<sup>104</sup> Kartini faces a dilemma when it comes to the tradition of *pingit*, the seclusion of unmarried women from the public, for on the one hand it is a form of oppression of women, but on the other it is a sign of nobility since it is applied only for Javanese priyayi women. When it comes to her religious practice, Kartini's tone is liberal: "I am a Moslem only because my ancestors were. How can I love a doctrine which I do not know - may never know? . . . Here no one speaks Arabic . . . Nevertheless, one can be good without being pious."<sup>105</sup> We learn from Kartini the tension among liberalism, patriarchal Javanese culture, and Islamism. And, it is her affection - her love for her ancestors and her father that sustains the racial sentiment in her secular - progressive view.

So far we have traced how racism is constructed in Indonesian context. Speaking a language and naming are not a matter of communication and identification but of a social status, nobility. The languages and the names carry with them the sentiments between the colonized and the colonizer, the native and the immigrant, the elite and the peasant, the West and the East, the pious and the traditional, the conservative and the liberal, the rational and the mythical, and

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<sup>100</sup> Shiraishi, "The Disputes between Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soetatmo Soeriokoesoemo," 99.

<sup>101</sup> Kartini, *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, 35–36.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

men and women. This view perpetuates in the current discussion on traditions as we find languages are central to the indigenous identities in Indonesia. *Bissu* is identified as a Bugis ancient tradition from the language they use in their rituals: *basa bissu* or *basa to rilangi*. A *calabai* cannot be identified as a *bissu* if they do not speak the language – one of the requirements to become a *bissu* is to demonstrate the fluency in the language. Language serves as a trope of indigenous identity and tradition. The sonic materiality of the language itself, at least among avant-garde artists, is sufficient to give a theatrical experience of the primitive – “an unmediated relationship to nature.”<sup>106</sup>

With this representation, it is often we find the indigenous traditions performed in famous world theaters, directed by eminent artists, are still “imagined to be primal and associated with the nascent development, with nature and children - immaturity and irrationalism - and with simplicity, naivety or honesty.”<sup>107</sup> In contrast, the appreciation of aesthetic creativity is given to the artists who organize and arrange the performances, despite their acknowledgement that their works are collaborative and the source of their inspirations comes from indigenous people. Indigenous traditions become merely visual spectacles; they are seductive because of their aberrations.

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<sup>106</sup> Julian Stallabrass, “The Idea of the Primitive: British Art and Anthropology 1918-1930,” *New Left Review*, no. 183 (1990): 99.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

## Chapter Three

### Hermaphrodite Priests of the Bugis

My ancestors were performers. In life. The earliest shamanic rituals involved women and men exchanging genders. Old, old rituals. Top-notch performances. Life and death stuff. We're talking cross-cultural here. We're talking rising way way way above being a man or a woman. That's how my ancestors would talk with the goddesses and the gods. Old rituals. (Kate Borstein)<sup>108</sup>

*Bissu* came from the Upper World at the beginning of time. *Bissu* are a sign of God. Nobody knows if God is [a] man or woman. And that's why we [the *bissu*] are both. (Saidi, the leader of the *bissu*)<sup>109</sup>

#### A. Hermaphrodite in the World

Why are concepts of the hermaphrodite and trance fundamental to the representations of the *bissu*? What is the discursive space that allows this kind of identity? I search for answers in the intersections of literature, avant-garde aesthetics, and anthropology as well as media practices. Central to this discussion is the question of how *bissu* priesthood is constructed as a 'distinct' Bugis cultural and religious trait.

The mediated representation of the *bissu* cannot be only depicted as a local cultural construct without mapping the discursive constellation and aesthetic mode in which *bissu* as a traditional transgender community is represented. To create a common ground for our discussion, I will explain the notion of androgyny in Western narrative, tracing it back in the Western literature. This chapter will give us the history, imagination and sentiment that invoke in the discursive constellation of hermaphrodite. They sustain and manifest in many forms of mediated representations, yet we find at the core, the spectacle of the transgender body remain rooted in the particular depiction of transgender body in their unstable identities, malicious potentials and disruptions of normal life. The spectacular transgender body perpetuates in the contemporary narratives and representations of transgender people. Established on this discursive ground, we will investigate the representations of the *bissu* in film and theater.

In film and theater, the *bissu* perform a cultural and religious transgender identity, suggesting their transformative potentials. The identity they perform appears to be foreign to local eyes, for the cultural identity they perform falls within the frame of culture as an extraordinary event. It constitutes a particular mode of living that is imaginary and apparently inhabitable, for it is oriented towards a particular utopian moral life, the life that serves as a critique to the social reality the *bissu* live in. It manifests as a desire towards authentic traditional life that is isolated from modern life. It constitutes a cultural and normative space in which the compulsory heterosexual norm ceases to operate. Overall, this chapter will explain how the *bissu* traditions are selected and conflated with modern aesthetic practices to construct a

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<sup>108</sup> Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (Routledge, 2013), 143.

<sup>109</sup> Grauer, *The Last Bissu: The Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*.

particular narrative of identity reveals not only what kind of culture is expected from *bissu* but how culture is expected to function in our global world. Transgenderism and indigeneity I will argue serve as a trope of authenticity and difference to constitute the transgender priesthood of the *bissu*.

In the Oxford Old English Dictionary, a little note under the noun of hermaphrodite warns us about the shift from normality to abnormality in the use of the word. Hermaphrodite was used in reference to human beings and animals that combine male and female sexes, that were considered to be normal, but since 1898 has been considered abnormal or monstrous. This word was first used in 1398, and later in 1594, it begins to pick up another meaning: an effeminate man or virile woman. Patrick Cheney describes that in classical philosophical and literary traditions, hermaphrodite is figuratively used as the perfect union of two different bodies, different sexes, therefore it is often used as a symbol of perfect love.<sup>110</sup>

Hermaphrodite is a trope that organizes horror, pleasure, and morality in one body. The stories of hermaphrodite are of the rupture of the soul and the body, of being born in a wrong body, of freedom of desire. It is a symbol of the union of the opposites. Silberman describes the Hermaphrodite as “a biform sign in which arbitrary semiological difference plays against sexual difference.”<sup>111</sup> With this character, hermaphrodite is seen as subversive of the natural order. As Plato says, the figure, “[produces] a counterfeit and unnatural lust.”<sup>112</sup> What Plato refers to is the hermaphrodite in the Greek myth. The myth tells us that Hermaphroditus realizes deformation of his body under the image of his father, Hermes, the god of language, and the expulsion of his mother, Aphrodite, the goddess of love. “His sexual suspension is about the presence and castration of the phallus, it is becoming man or not-man.”<sup>113</sup> Within this myth, hermaphrodite is “the effacement of sexual difference and the disfigurement of bodily form.”<sup>114</sup>

If hermaphrodite in Platonic and neo-Platonic writings are characterized as a subversive figure, in the medical narratives, hermaphrodites, especially female ones, are “given a freakish heroine status, or celebrated (tongue-in-cheek) as a sexual prodigy.”<sup>115</sup> This pejorative connotation is perpetuated following the medicalization of the hermaphrodite around the mid-nineteenth century. The medical narratives of the mid-nineteenth century mostly emphasize on lustful double sexuality. Hermaphrodite is given pejorative connotations such as freak, impostor, imperfection, and deformity or malformation.<sup>116</sup>

In 1971, introduced by biologist Richard Goldschmidt in 1917 and later supported by the Intersex Society of North America founded by Cheryl Chase in 1993, the term intersex comes to replace the pejorative terms, and hermaphrodite is given pejorative synonyms such as vice, tribade and buggery. Vice and buggery have the other meanings in which hermaphrodite is epitomized. Vice besides it refers to deformity and immorality, it also refers to trickery. Bugger

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<sup>110</sup> P. Cheney, “Moll Cutpurse as Hermaphrodite in Dekker and Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl*,” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 19, no. 2 (2010): 122.

<sup>111</sup> L. Silberman, “The Hermaphrodite and the Metamorphosis of Spenserian Allegory,” *English Literary Renaissance* 17, no. 2 (1987): 212.

<sup>112</sup> León (Hebreo), *Dialogues of love* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 140.

<sup>113</sup> Silberman, “The Hermaphrodite and the Metamorphosis of Spenserian Allegory,” 212.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 222–23.

<sup>115</sup> E. Donoghue, “Imagined More than Women: Lesbians as Hermaphrodites, 1671-1766,” *Women’s History Review* 2, no. 2 (1993): 200.

<sup>116</sup> Dreger 1998; Matta 2005; Reis 2005; and Mettauer 1824 in E. Reis, “Divergence or Disorder?: The Politics of Naming Intersex,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2007): 536.



refers to abominable heresy, even though in the modern usage, this is not recognized anymore. In the contemporary narratives in the West, since the early 1990s, hermaphrodite is used as a political slogan to protest “corrective” genital surgery.<sup>117</sup>

In contrast to the Hellenistic narratives, hermaphrodite occupies a privileged position in the Hinduist – Buddhist - traditions, the traditions that have been central to South and Southeast East Asian culture. Hermaphrodite is characterized by the idea of reincarnation, divine power, and sacrifice. These symbolic values can be traced in Mahabharata, in which we encounter the stories of divine transgender incarnations. Ardhanarishvara, the symbol of love and perfection, as Vanita describes, is an androgynous form of Shiva and his consort, Parvati.<sup>118</sup> Shiva manifests in a woman named Mohini.<sup>119</sup> It is Shiva/ Krishna-Mohini, as we follow Vanita’s description, which hijras (Indian female-identified males, or transgendered, transsexual or intersexual individual ) perform in the rite at Koovagam, a village in Tamil Nadu should be noted that many of *hijras* are Muslims.<sup>120</sup> Shikandini or Amba, as Doniger points out, was born as a girl but raised as a man - and later incarnates as a man, and after her death, she turns back to a woman.<sup>121</sup> Arjuna, another divine figure we read in Doniger’s retelling the myth, is cursed and becomes a cross-dressing man,<sup>122</sup> the role that becomes the source of laughter in Javanese puppet theater.

The narratives I lay out above become religious and cultural ground for traditional transgender communities to claim their identities. But, the ground is not autonomous, it is promoted and maintained through global aesthetic and anthropological interventions. We learn from the Hellenistic and Hinduist traditions that hermaphrodite body is fraught with the tension between inner feeling and outer outlook, morality and sensuality, and science and art. Hermaphrodite reflects the modern – Western – understanding of culture in its sensual – exotic – form. It serves as a trope to provoke and organize horror, desire and pleasure. The stories of hermaphrodite are of the rupture of the soul and the body, of being born in a wrong body, of freedom of desire. It dramatizes amorphous identity, transgressing the heterosexual normative boundary. Within this image, hermaphrodite is considered to be a temporal and transitory identity that provides a medium of interaction between the natural world and spiritual world. The hermaphrodite body serves as dispossessed body, a site of manifestation of spirits. Its performance constitutes tension and threat because potential violence appears imminent. Hermaphrodite in its grotesque forms becomes the sources of laughter and tragedy as well as critiques against the ontological binary order. It poses an attack to the construction of (heterosexual) identity as natural or God-given.

Hermaphrodite is an avant-garde figure since it serves the purpose of theater to create a ‘cult’ community, to subvert the conventional practices (mode of perception and representation), and to criticize rationalism, materialism and institutional Abrahamic religions.<sup>123</sup> It provides a site in which Avant-Garde artists manage to constellate "Nonreproductivity, nonlinearity, and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 536–37.

<sup>118</sup> R. Vanita, *Love’s Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West* (Springer, 2005), 74.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 74–75.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>121</sup> Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 281–86.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 280–81.

<sup>123</sup> Christopher Innes, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde* (CUP Archive, 1984), 3.

fragmentations" in their depiction of characters, identities, and social practices.<sup>124</sup> Hermaphrodite provides a critique against the position of sexuality as abjection and perversion.<sup>125</sup>

Hermaphrodite is featured in theaters, in particular burlesque and vaudeville in the US during the 19th century, and continues in the blues tradition in the 1920s and 1930s, transvestite or cross-gendered individual are popular.<sup>126</sup> Homosexual and transgender figures have been featured in mainly underground and independent films since 1930 until 1972. With the growing awareness of marginality and violence against homosexual people, the films depict homosexuality in the forms of "performative parody", modern subculture, norm, (sexual) desire and intimacy.<sup>127</sup>

Hermaphrodite emerges from the avant-garde formal mechanism of queerness through the embodiment of two sexes.<sup>128</sup> "The queer body . . . is simultaneously mother and father, masculine and feminine, in direct contradiction to the "natural" binary order of two distinct or opposite sexes, coupling but never completely integrated."<sup>129</sup> Hermaphrodite becomes a figure that subverts the institutions of family, marriage, and nobility and the church.<sup>130</sup>

## **B. Hermaphrodite: Dispossessed Body in South and Southeast Asia**

From Michael Peletz and Frederick Smith, we learn that the association of spirit possession with transgender is common in the cultures of South and Southeast Asia.<sup>131</sup> Cross or transgendered behaviors are the manifestation of the unity of the female body of the mediums and the male spirits, and vice versa. However, it is the spirits that are considered to be the mover, agency of the body. A female spirit medium attains their masculine identity when they show behaviors signified as masculine behaviors, and the behaviors occur only during trance, suggesting that the spirit that possesses the body is male. Most of the spirit mediums are women and effeminate men or transgendered people.<sup>132</sup>

The performance of transgender trance like the other forms of avant-garde ontological subversion, I argue, creates critical moments that emerge as the spectators experience and are absorbed by the enchanting theatrical performances and begin to educate themselves with what they watch. The integration of Eastern mythical thought itself, as Renato Poggioli points out, has been the main inspiration of the emerging avant-garde aesthetics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that finds its (semi) scientific ground on the Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>133</sup> Eastern mythical thought, Eugenio Barba describes, with their disinterest with social reality, offers a complex

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<sup>124</sup> Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (South End Press, 1984), 13–14.

<sup>125</sup> Harradine, David, "Abject Identities and Fluid Performances: Theorizing the Leaking Body," in *The Body in Performance*, ed. Patrick Campbell (Routledge, 2014), 71.

<sup>126</sup> Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2013), 218.

<sup>127</sup> Harry M. Benshoff, *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader* (Psychology Press, 2004), 9–10.

<sup>128</sup> Sarah Bay-Cheng, *Mama Dada: Gertrude Stein's Avant-Garde Theatre* (Routledge, 2004), 12.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Michael G. Peletz, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (Routledge, 2009); Frederick M. Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>132</sup> Peletz, *Gender Pluralism*; Smith, *The Self Possessed*.

<sup>133</sup> Renato Poggioli, *Avant-Garde* (Harvard University Press, 1968), 166.

conception of time, space, and intriguing symbolic codes of movements and postures.<sup>134</sup> And, for spectators, the performance might be meaningless for the queer performances violate conventional semantic, but it has a reciprocal affect, the transformative potential in which the spectators reflect internally what they see, creating meanings and values that are relevant to their own life.<sup>135</sup> The images of the hermaphrodite show a similar feature through times – it is constellated through estrangement, exoticism; the only difference is that in our modern time, Poggioli argues, it does not come to us through tales but through visual, theatrical, and ritual experience.<sup>136</sup>

How hermaphrodite, transgenderism, functions as a cultural trait, we need to understand first how trance is represented. Let me start my explanation at this point through Mead's *Trance and Dance in Bali*, a documentary film released in 1952 based on Mead's research in Bali in 1936-1939, sponsored mainly by the committee for the Study of Dementia Praecox (Schizophrenia) - Mead's return to Bali on February 1939 is motivated by the emerging research on schizophrenia.<sup>137</sup>

The trance occurs when the followers of the Barong (Dragon in Mead's translation) attack the witch, but the witch turns on them and they go into trance. The priest comes and sprays holy water to the performers, they wake up, and again attack the witch. This occurs several times, before the female dancers show up in the scene and begin pierce their own bodies with krises, though they remain unharmed. The male dancers also begin to pierce themselves with their krises.

The trance occurs mysteriously, it is not something that the performers enact or fake; if they did so, as Mead tells us, they would hurt themselves. Mead even points out an older woman, a wife of the priest, who tells her before the performance that she will not go trance, but she is the one who has the longest deep trance. The spontaneity and mysteriousness of trance are apparently correlated to the spiritual aura of the performance, since it is performed in the front yard of a temple. And those who cannot recover immediately from their trance must be brought inside the temple for recovery.

What I see represented in the film is the orchestration of horror and violence. If there is something I might be able to learn from the Balinese, it would be that the archaic movements and postures associated with Balinese dance and culture, and the story, *Calon Arang*, are part of Balinese religious traditions. Meads' background stories with their intention to help the viewer understand every scene enacted on screen accentuate horror and violence. The camera directs the attention to the violent performances of trance, even though it does not have significant symbolic values in relation to the stories that Mead narrates. I see the women pushing the points of their krises against their necks, moving their heads violently, a few of them are seen with bare breasts. I see a man in a white loincloth piercing the kris into his neck until the kris bends, the man falls down, unharmed and in a deep trance. The camera focuses on the man, and then moves to the bent kris, while Mead points out the violence of the bent kris.

The Balinese dancers seem to move unconsciously during trance, making the movements seem natural. The body with their primal energy and archaic postures and movements conceal

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<sup>134</sup> Eugenio Barba, "Eurasian Theatre," in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley, and Michael Gissenwehler (Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990), 35.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>137</sup> Ira Jacknis, "Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: Their Use of Photography and Film," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (1988): 161–62.

the absence of human agency and the manifestation of the absent, the spirit. We follow the dancers in each movement they make, they appear to be moved by the spirit, the unconscious. They are cultural, not pathological, for they have their own mechanism that is considered as normal among the Balinese. The scenes offer us a way to observe how psychological and religious meanings unfold, constituting a distinct temporality of time and space, divorced from the narrative motif of the performance. The performance of trance and kris dances invokes that the performance is mythical and cultural.

Yet, the above imagination that I create following the scenes and Mead's background narratives fails to convince me that the trance that I watch is related to the "ritual" that the dancers perform. Instead I am more convinced that trance is related to the religious trainings of the dancers, regardless of whether or not the performances they enact are ritualistic or staged, ancient or modern. And, it becomes more intriguing when we hear Mead tells us as if trance can be but performed as a part of ritual enactment. What Mead does not tell us in the film is that the dances are staged. As Ira Jacknis informs us that the dances are performed during the day to allow the camera to record them.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, from Belo's report, we know that the dances are not Balinese ancient ritual dances, but they are invented by the Balinese artists and popularized for tourist performance under Walter Spies' patron.<sup>139</sup> The series of scenes we watch on the film, as Belo reports, are selected from the footages recorded from a performance ordered by Mead and Bateson for Mead's 36<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 16, 1937, and the footage from Belo's research collection.<sup>140</sup> And, the inclusion of women in the trance dances is Bateson's idea, as Bateson himself tells us,

We had seen women dance with krisses at temple festivals at night and had observed that their dancing, though nominally the same as that of the men, was fundamentally different . . . . We wanted to get a motion-picture record of the women's dancing, and therefore suggested to the dancing club of Pagoetan, in 1937, that they should include in their performance some women with krisses. This they did without any hesitation, but by 1939 the women were an established part of the performance.<sup>141</sup>

Yet, the modern aesthetic interventions and the dancers' rigorous trainings do not prevent Belo from saying: "actors and dancers are like puppets, for they behave in accordance with a spirit which is not their own."<sup>142</sup> I find with the association of trance with the spirits and rituals do not explain how the dancers entrance during the commissioned performances for tourists and researchers. This is what makes Spies and Beryl de Zoete complain, and I find their argument is more convincing when we place in the context of the modern performances in Bali:

People who know nothing else about Bali know that there are dances in which men in a state of ecstasy attack themselves with their krisses, that there are other dances in which little girls who are put into a state of trance by incense of smoke and singing, perform feats of acrobatics of which they would not be capable in a normal condition. Trance states are to most people much more interesting than dance states, and they have hitherto absorbed a perhaps unfair amount of attention in books and films of Bali. The subject of trance

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>140</sup> Belo (1960), 159-169 in Ibid., 167, 171.

<sup>141</sup> Bateson and Mead (1942), 167; Belo (1960), 103 in Ibid., 168.

<sup>142</sup> Jane Belo, *Trance in Bali* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 12.

consciousness is of extreme interest, and Bali undoubtedly provides almost unlimited material for such a study; but even in Bali it is quite another study than dancing and, though evidently more sensational, much more monotonous. There is a sense, I think, in which it would be true to say that all dancing in Bali is related to trance-consciousness; that is to say that the personality of the dancer is to some extent disassociated during the dance, and his consciousness becomes of another kind. But this I believe to be true of all great dancers and actors, all over the world, and not only of dancers but of all artists - painters, poets, musicians. Clearly their state of mind is quite different from that of the ordinary medium. But their accessibility to influences other than we reckon with in ordinary consciousness is perhaps similar. A doctor can examine the reactions of a medium and decide whether he is in trance or not; but even he cannot tell us anything about these unfamiliar states of consciousness beyond the fact that they exist. A lay-observer can also note certain symptoms of entranced persons or dancers in Bali, even though he be unable to offer any explanation of them.<sup>143</sup>

Belo's description of the Balinese trance dancers actually echoes what Antonin Artaud states when he sees the Balinese dance performed at the colonial exposition in Paris in 1931. Evan Winet writes that the dances Artaud sees in the Indonesian pavilion "resembles nothing so much as the tourist samplers that had already begun to evolve on the island itself."<sup>144</sup> Further he explains,

The *kebyar*, the *janger*, and the modern *baris* were all under fifty years old. In fact, the *kebyar duduk* was only first performed in 1925 by the first Balinese celebrity dancer, I Nyoman Mario . . . . The gamelan itself seems to have been a modern gong *kebyar* rather than one of several older gamelan configurations. Inasmuch as even the *legong* (originally a court form) and the *barong* (which evolved from pre-Hindu animistic rituals) were presented in acceptably secular revised forms, the entire program failed to predate the Dutch colonization. Nevertheless, it was described as fully representative of ancient Balinese Hindu-Buddhist culture.<sup>145</sup>

Yet, in those dance-drama performances, which he calls as "pure theater", Artaud finds living Balinese spiritual traditions. I quote the long phrase to demonstrate that the imagination that Artaud has reflected in his esoteric poetic prose and metaphors is to characterize the mythical Orient, suggesting its sharp contrast to the rational – secular – Occident:

Everything is . . . regulated and impersonal; not a movement of the muscles, not the rolling of an eye but seem to belong to a kind of reflective mathematics which controls everything and by means of which everything happens. And the strange thing is that in this systematic depersonalization, in these purely muscular facial expressions, applied to the features like masks, everything produces a significance, everything affords the maximum effect.

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<sup>143</sup> Walter Spies and Beryl De Zoete, *Dance & Drama in Bali* (Tuttle Publishing, 2001), 67.

<sup>144</sup> Stanley Vincent Longman and Evan Winet, eds., "Great Reckonings in a Simulated City: Artaud's Misunderstanding of Balinese Theatre," in *Crosscurrents in the Drama: East and West* (University of Alabama Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

A kind of terror seizes us at the thought of these mechanized beings, whose joys and griefs seem not their own but at the service of age-old rites, as if they were dictated by superior intelligence.

In the last analysis it is this impression of a superior and prescribed Life which strikes us most in this spectacle that so much resembles a rite one might profane. It has the solemnity of a sacred rite - the hieratic quality of the costumes gives each actor a double body and a double set of limbs - and the dancer bundled into his costume seems to be nothing more than his own effigy. Over and beyond the music's broad, overpowering rhythm there is another extremely fragile, hesitant, and sustained music in which, it seems, the most precious metals are being pulverized, where springs of water are bubbling up as in the state of nature, and long processions of insects file through the plants, with a sound like that of light itself, in which the noises of deep solitudes seem to be distilled into showers of crystals, etc. . . .<sup>146</sup>

Among surrealist and avant-garde artists, and Artaud is a prime example, trance, Bay-Cheng argues, has a "quasi-mystical therapeutic aim . . . which was intended both to strip away the constraints of civilization, restoring the natural relationship to the spiritual universe, and to purge the audience of violence by indulging them . . . in images of 'gratuitous crime' and cruelty."<sup>147</sup>

Following the above debate, what is relevant to our discussion is that trance becomes a key word to understand the representations of traditions in the East, Indonesia in particular. We learn that trance has a particular precondition. With my observation of how the *bissu* go into trance, I would agree with B. J. A. Lovric's account of Balinese trance:

[I]t is precipitated by a highly charged emotional and mystically-loaded atmosphere. There is a pre-drama atmosphere of quietude, isolation and restraint, abruptly shattered by a virtual bombardment of auditory, olfactory and visual stimuli. There is a cumulative mounting of excitement and tension, partly induced by the tone and rhythm of the gamelan orchestra and the accumulation of olfactory stimulation through the burning incense and fragrant woods.<sup>148</sup>

This precondition contains ritual and psychological affects which even though performed outside of the ritual time, still creates the atmosphere that encourages dancers to go into trance, suggesting that trance is never disassociated from the religious life of the Balinese people. In other words, trance is a state of consciousness that is only possible among pious Balinese people. It implies that the Balinese traditions are never totally secular, for they are integral to the religious piety of the Balinese people.

Through trance I look into how culture and nature are placed. Trance alienates me as an observer and limits my capacity to explain what I see. The movements and postures do not only become the object of my analysis, but they also affect me a particular way that frames how I see them. I am cognizant of the limits of camera that shapes the representation. Although the Balinese trance is presented as a distinct form of 'consciousness' associated with the Balinese religious traditions; it shares some aspects with the technique that avant-garde artists use to make

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<sup>146</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards, Later Printing Used edition (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 58.

<sup>147</sup> C. D. Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre, 1892-1992* (Psychology Press, 1993), 16.

<sup>148</sup> B. J. A. Lovric, "Balinese Theatre: A Metaphysics in Action," *Asian Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (1988): 39.

their characters alive and natural on stage.<sup>149</sup> The Balinese trance offers an alternative form of reality divorced from the banality of our everyday life. It subverts normal ontological order by crossing the ontological boundaries. It is a moment when men and women are liberated from the conventional - normative – gender order.<sup>150</sup>

For Mead and Bateson, working in the 1930s, filming is the most expensive way of collecting data, therefore, as they report, "We therefore reserved the motion-picture camera for the more active and interesting moments, and recorded the slower and less significant behaviors with the still camera."<sup>151</sup> From this point, we know how important trance is for Mead and Bateson as it becomes the central theme of the documentary film, and how important the data, as we follow Jacknis' report, for the committee for the Study of Dementia Praecox (Schizophrenia), the main patron of Mead's research.<sup>152</sup>

Having explained how fundamental transgender body and trance are in the representations of indigenous people, I will now turn to the *bissu*. In the following discussion, I will demonstrate how transgender body and trance shape the representations of the *bissu* in films and theaters. The *bissu* identity projected in the films and theaters, I argue, is not rooted in the Bugis-Makassar tradition and does not reflect merely the Bugis-Makassar world view, but it emerges as an outcome of an intercultural interaction between the *bissu* and the modern aesthetic practices, artists, scholars, and government.

### C. *Bissu's* Life on Screen and Stage

*Bissu* has been featured in films and media since 1931. In the black-white silent recorded by the Amsterdam Koloniaal Instituut, the *bissu* are seen performing the ritual of exorcism, as the subtitle says, in the coronation ceremony of Bone King, Andi Mapanjoekhi, on April 2, 1931. They wear baju bodo and sarongs with their long hair arranged in a bun on the back, walk around gracefully and dance around the royal regalia. Their leader, wearing a traditional Bone cap, after the dance, sits in the middle, chants and moves around the pot above the regalia. Smoke vapors from the pot. The crowd stood in order behind the Dutch armed guards. On the back, we see the *bissu* performed *lalosu-arumpigi* (rattles made from bamboo and wood shape like hornbill, *alo* in Bugis language) dance, and the other with baku panampa on their heads swirl in the narrow path between the guards and the spectators. Next to them, sit the drummers. The energetic sound they play can be seen from their fast moving hands, and the movements of the dancers. The ritual is performed in a yard in front of a big stilt house. The series of the performance display the pomp of the coronation ceremony. The king is inaugurated by the Dutch governor, which ends the ceremony. At the end of the film, we see the *bissu* walking on the street, with a large crowd behind them, and the people cramped on the edge of the street to watch what appears as the parade of the king.

The films that record South Sulawesi traditions such as *Ring of Fire* (1988) and *Ghost of Sulawesi* (2000) never miss to show *bissu* with their performance of spirit possession. In the *Rings of Fire*, the *bissu* are seen performing spirit possession in a wedding ceremony, and in

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<sup>149</sup> Spies and Zoete, *Dance & Drama in Bali*, 67.

<sup>150</sup> For further discussion on trance and gender, see Fatimah Tobing Rony, "The Photogenic Cannot Be Tamed: Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's 'Trance and Dance in Bali,'" *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (2006): 5–27.

<sup>151</sup> Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, "Balinese Character," *New York: New York Academy of Sciences*, 1942, 50.

<sup>152</sup> Jacknis, "Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali," 161.

Ghost of Sulawesi, the *bissu* perform ma'giri on the edge of Tempe Lake as a sacred crocodile are leaving the village. In the following discussion, we will explore the *bissu* in Rhoda Grauer's *The Last Bissu: Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*, The National Geographic Channel's Taboo: Third Sex, and Robert Wilson's avant-garde theater: *I La Galigo* (the name is taken from the Bugis mythical epic).

#### **D. The Last *Bissu*: Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo**

It is loud with the drum and people yell and the stomping feet, with the smoke vapors. The *bissu* perform ma'giri, the performance in which *bissu* dance and stab themselves, their palm, neck, and stomach, to prove that they possess spirits to protect them from the sharp crises. Grauer introduces the film by saying, "On the tropical island, in the heart of Southeast Asia, the ancient sect of the transvestite priests called the *bissu* struggle to survive." Throughout the scenes, we are told by the local scholars and historians that the *bissu* are ancient Bugis priests whose roles are recorded in *I La Galigo* (the Bugis mythical epic). They function is to advise and entertain the kings, to guard the royal regalia, and to perform the ritual of fertility. The power and authority of the *bissu* come from their transgender body that serves as a spirit medium. In each cultural event, we see the *bissu* are dispossessed, become aggressive, and speak to the government and the community to warn them the danger of ignoring traditions and regalia.

Saidi, the new appointed *puang matoa* (*bissu* leader), tells us that they are a *bissu* since the spiritual skills they inherit are not from training; they do not learn them from a teacher, otherwise they become only a sandro (healer). It is on Saidi's hands, the survival of the *bissu* rely upon. We follow Saidi's struggle to maintain the almost extinct *bissu* traditions. The *bissu* have been marginalized because of their practices are considered heretic, many of them are killed in the 1960s by the radical Muslim separatist movement. Yet, we are not told why in 2001, there is an attempt from the *adat* council, with the support from the district government, to revive *bissu*. In 2001, the project of revival of the *bissu* is initiated. Saidi is elected as the new leader, the relic house is replaced with a new one, and Ancik is the first *bissu* disciple that Saidi choose for *bissu* regeneration. Saidi is officially appointed by the traditional council and the district government. The old regalia house is destroyed and replaced with the wood stilt house used to be the office of BKKBN, the National Family Planning Coordinating Board.

After all the extravaganza of the *puang matoa* inauguration we watch in Segeri, we follow Saidi in their trip to Samatellu Lompo, one of 117 islands in Pangkep Regency. In Saidi's face, we see that their task at this time is not less daunting. They have to ask permission form Ancik's parents to take Ancik as their first disciple. As the wooden boat is approaching Samatellu, Saidi give an offering to the sea, an egg and betel leaves. Saidi enters a modest wooden stilt house. In the kitchen, Ancik's mother has just finished cooking rice. Saidi opens the conversation with a casual topic, a wedding party Shortly, Saidi talked about their intention to take Ancik with them to Pangkajene. The conversation turns intense.

"I ask myself, why did God give me a child like this?" Ancik's mother says with her face wet of tears.

"When you gave birth, everyone said, 'this is a boy.' No parents wish for a transvestite . . . but as the boy grows, his true spirit emerges," Saidi replied.

"He always made girl's clothes and if I hid them, he'd find them again. Some of our families said if they see him in girl's clothes, they will beat him. But I said no no no, you can't do that. He is my child." Ancik's mother said, wiping her tears. Ancik's father never speaks a word, silent and never looks at Saidi into their eyes.



“If someone calls you queer [*calabai*], don’t listen. If someone says you have a big dick, quiet, because we do have dicks. But if they say you bring bad luck . . . fight! Throw rocks at them” Saidi said, rising their voice.

Silent for a moment, Ancik’s mother finally gives her permission and asks Saidi to take care of her ‘son’. Ancik wipes their tears, while smiling to their mother, they come to their father, sit on the floor, in front of him, shake and kiss their father’s hand. Still no word comes from their father. They move to their mother and apologize.

“Even when you become a *bissu*, don’t forget to visit your parents. Listen to them [Saidi]. Do what they say. But it’s still up to you to take care of yourself.” Ancik’s mother tells her ‘son’ and embraces ‘him’, as if that will be the last time she sees ‘him’.

The wooden boat is about to leave the island, Ancik reluctantly raises their hands, when their parents wave to them. At the end of the film, Saidi, sitting on a bench and looking towards the sea, tells Ancik that God is neither male nor female, so are they. On their return to Pangkajene, Saidi promises to educate Ancik and to preserve the *bissu* traditions. Saidi and Ancik leave us on the beach as the dusk creeps over the mangroves.

### **E. Taboo: The Third Sex**

"Every culture has its own standards for what is socially acceptable. The following program contains graphic images and female nudity. Viewers discretion is advised." After we are warned with what we expect to see, we are surprised by the energetic drumming rhythm and explosion of the actions of the warriors with their threatening moves, an East Asian, boy who pierced his cheek with a bamboo handle of umbrella, a ritual in a temple, indigenous men dancing in a desert and tropical island, panorama of village and desert, the nude Western men and women posed for the camera, a female East Asian singer, a muscular man lifting weights in a gym, a wedding couple apparently white Europeans, an African man with bare chest herding his cattle in a desert, a geisha, an indigenous woman with bare breasts holding her child, a Chinese trainer with boys in a training hall, a girl performing a ballet, a transgender pageant show in India. After this series of clips shown in thirty-seven seconds, we come to the main themes of the film, the third sex: the *hijra* of India, five genders in the Bugis of Indonesia, and gender swap among the villagers in Albania. The visual constellation of the queerness of gender and sex framed under the concept of culture and norm lead me to expect something that is unusual, beyond ordinary life.

At the beginning on the part of Bugis five genders, five Bugis people representing the five genders are posed for the camera: male, female, *calabai*, *calalai*, and *bissu*. *Calalai* and *calabai* show up briefly in the introduction. We then follow the *bissu* who perform a fertility ritual. We follow them through out the film, from their performance of ritual in a sacred cave, on a farm, and in the relic house. Spirit possession is central to all of the *bissu*'s performances. From scene to scene, we are guided by the explanations from the narrator and the explanations from the *bissu* and the anthropologists. *Puang matoa*, the leader of the *bissu*, tells us that the role of the *bissu* is to balance the society, to create harmony, and to give fertility to the land. Their transgender body, as *Puang matoa* tells us, is destined for performing their spiritual task. Sharyn Graham Davis, an anthropologist, tells us that the fusion of male and female of the *bissu* serves as spirit medium to bestow powerful blessing. At the end of the session, Evelyn Blackwood, another anthropologist, explains that the Bugis accepts transgenderism partly because of their (indigenous) religious belief in which gods and deities are seen to be the fusion of male and female.

Are *calabai* and *calalai* also accepted because of the religious reason? We are offered only a short scene on the introduction, where they are explained that they are accepted in the Bugis society. Let me return to the introductory scene and explain what we see and how we make sense of *calalai* and *calabai* in the constellation of the visual representations of Bugis genders. Like in the opening of the film, we see a series of footages, from the *bissu*'s ritual performance, two elementary school girls wearing veils walking on a crowded street, a couple sitting and lazing in the porch of a wooden stilt house, an old woman with a blue veil laughing, and a *bissu* in their white costume completing their chant. The camera at this point begins to move slower, directing our attention to the outlook of the *bissu*, *calalai* (female transvestite), and *calabai* (male transvestite). While looking at these series of scenes, the narrator tells us:

In many cultures, the person existing outside the two accepted genders is seen as confronting, even threatening. But gender is defined by culture and on South Sulawesi, the Bugis believe that in addition to man, woman and *bissu*, there are two more. These two additional genders are made up of people who in the West would be considered transvestites.

In a slow motion, the camera focuses on the outlook of Tambu, the *calalai*, from their black pants to the red plaid shirt, then moves to a new scene where we see Popi, the *calabai*, holding a giant python. Tambu tells us with their demure smile, "I feel comfortable as a *calalai*, my family is also comfortable. As long as I am a good person, and I work hard people accept me." Popi, whose real name is Abdurrahman, with their soft voice and straight face, tells us: "I am not special. The Bugis culture accepts all five genders." After the introductory scenes, we move to the farm, where our narrator tells us that Tambu and Popi join the fertility ritual. We see Tambu walking behind *Puang matoa* Saidi, holding a royal canopy. And behind Tambu, it looks like Popi wearing *baku panampa* on their head. Tambu looks casual with their bare head, hooded sweater and pants, while the *bissu* and *calabai* look formal with their sarong and head covers. *Puang matoa* Saidi explains, in Bugis language, that the five genders must be accepted, and they pointed out that *calalai* remains marginalized in the Bugis society. But the English translation does not tell us this part but underscores the significant point that Saidi emphasizes that in the Bugis society the five genders have to live in harmony.

## F. Queer Culture

The National Geographic Channel's *Taboo: The Third Sex* has a wider circulation and more general audience. The serial television programs of *Taboo* are aimed at educating audience with cultural practices unusual to the Western audience. It features the bizarre cultural practices selected from Asia, Europe, South and North America. From nudity to extreme body modifications, from strange disease to bizarre ritual practices, and from teenage exorcists in Texas to transgender priests in South Sulawesi, the program promises:

We take you beyond your comfort zone and across cultural borders to explore rituals and customs that are acceptable in some cultures but forbidden, illegal or reviled in others. Crossing the boundary between modern practices and ancient beliefs, this series showcases a mosaic of human lifestyles and values.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> "Taboo," *National Geographic Channel - Videos, TV Shows & Photos - Asia*, accessed April 13, 2016, <http://natgeotv.com/asia/taboo>.

In the documentary series, we are offered the culture in its queer form, in its shocking form, that intrigues us how such cultures are acceptable, and what kinds of normative values the communities embrace, and what kinds of religions they practice. Yet, if these questions we seek to answer in the films, we might be disappointed, since the arrangement of the clips and performances in the films are so overwhelming that it provides a little space for explanation. The portion of visual entertainment is prioritized than that of education.

Grauer's *The Last Bissu* pivots around the struggle of the *bissu* to survive in the Bugis culture predominated by Islam. The film perpetuates the colonial view on Islam as foreign and destructive to local traditions. However, we find it is hard to hide the Islamic piety that the *Bissu* embody such as *Haji Sake*, the *bissu* leader who performs hajj and attires with Manik<sup>2</sup> veil, kebaya, and sarong, a typical outlook we find in the female Bugis *haji*.

It is Grauer's interest in ritual dance that brings her into contact with the *bissu*. Grauer is known through her works on the PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, including her eight-hour documentary series on world dance, *Dancing*. In her interview with LA Times before *Dancing* premiering on PBS on May 1993, Grauer says, "If you understand someone's dance, you immediately start learning about their culture and their values."<sup>154</sup>

It is the same interest that brings Claire Holt to record the *bissu* ritual dance in Segeri in 1938. She came to Segeri to record the ritual dance for the major exhibition in Paris, "Theatre and Danses aux Indes Neerlandaises."<sup>155</sup> Grauer and Holt show their concerns on the survival of the *bissu* and their traditions. Holt sounds skeptical. With the rise of Islamic religiosity and modernity, she predicts that "if *bissu* continue to exist as a separate class for another few decades, they are well under way of becoming merely entertainers. Perhaps theirs is the lot of turning from priests into clowns."<sup>156</sup>

The concern Grauer and Holt have is not new. It has been raised since the invention of camera in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Lumières record Ashanti dances and a tribal parade in 1897, Thomas Edison Sioux Ghost Dance and Buffalo Dance in 1894 and a series of Native American dances in 1898 and 1901, and Haddon Native rituals in the Torres Strait located between Australia and New Guinea in 1898.<sup>157</sup>

The Australian anthropologist Rudolf Poch writes,

Whoever will come after me . . . will no longer be able to witness the natives there dancing in their pure original state, dressed in their wonderfully decorated bamboo skirts and decked out with their fabulous, noble headdresses made of birds of paradise feathers.<sup>158</sup>

For that reason, the films constitute their own notion of primitivity, authenticity and premodernity. Do we manage to avoid these topics in our postmodern debate on culture?

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<sup>154</sup> Susan King, "More than an Expression : PBS Series Traces Dances as Art, Religion Nd Political Weapon," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed April 13, 2016, [http://articles.latimes.com/1993-05-02/news/tv-29947\\_1\\_political-weapon](http://articles.latimes.com/1993-05-02/news/tv-29947_1_political-weapon).

<sup>155</sup> Deena Burton, *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Dance Ethnography of Claire Holt* (Xlibris Corporation, 2009), 4.

<sup>156</sup> Claire Holt, *Dance and Quest in Celebes* (Paris: Les Archives Internationales de la Danse, 1939), 35.

<sup>157</sup> Julie Stone Peters, "Drama, Primitive Ritual, Ethnographic Spectacle: Genealogies of World Performance (Ca. 1890 – 1910)," *Modern Language Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 84–85, doi:10.1215/00267929-2008-030.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

## G. *I La Galigo*

Saidi emerges on the stage gracefully, silently chanting. Still stands Saidi, when the musicians ascend the stage and bow their heads as they see Saidi. After receiving the salute, Saidi takes a seat on a mat, with their legs on their sides, as if they are Bugis Muslim women reading the Qur'an. In front of Saidi, the *I La Galigo* text is placed on a wood stand, as if it is the Qur'an. Silent. The audience is waiting. Saidi begins to read, sing. After several verses, the music intervenes, in some scenes Saidi's voice overlaps with the music. The audience is thrilled. Saidi's singing the *I La Galigo* sounds like *mallagu*, the Bugis way of reading (singing) the Qur'an. It is the sound we hear in mosques and in houses. The voice brings us back to the life in a Bugis village, the spiritual and traditional life. I believe no body understands what Saidi sings. *I La Galigo* is written in the old Bugis language. They are intelligible only for those who study the language and few among the elders. It reminds me the Bugis Muslims who listen attentively when the Qur'an is read, but do not understand what they listen to. For the theater audience, *massureq* offers them a unique theatrical – auditory – experience, relieving them from the boring daily routines; for the Bugis Muslims, listening to the Qur'anic recitation/ reading offers them rewards and blessing from God. For the theater audience and the Bugis Muslims, understanding is secondary.

That is the opening scene of from the theater of *I La Galigo*. From 2003 to 2008, the *bissu* involved in the production of the theater of *I La Galigo* (the 14th century Bugis epic) directed by an eminent American avant-garde playwright, Robert Wilson. The idea to present *I La Galigo* to Robert Wilson comes from Grauer, who has been in South Sulawesi since 1998 with her documentary film project on *bissu*. She is inspired by the performances of Javanese and Balinese dance in France several decades ago. Halilintar Lathief, an anthropologist, tells her that to understand *bissu*, she has to learn *I La Galigo*.<sup>159</sup> She chooses Wilson because the Bugis mythical epic will fit with Wilson's avant-garde art, and she knows Wilson well.<sup>160</sup>

Performed in Asia, Europe and the US from 2004 to 2008, the theater of *I La Galigo* provokes the national debate on the relation between art production and ethnic identity. It has a significant impact on (re)positioning the *bissu*. During the production of the theater, Wilson consults with the *bissu*, since, as Wilson says in several interviews that "the *bissu* know the story; they own the story."<sup>161</sup> "First of all, you have to respect the indigenous culture of South Sulawesi and the epic nature of the material," but he adds, "you have to be careful that you don't become a slave to it."<sup>162</sup> Wilson views his task as a director is to provide "mega-structure" in which "various people can have different roles to play."<sup>163</sup> In constructing the structure, Wilson always listens to the *bissu*. "We are making the piece for them and with them," says Wilson.<sup>164</sup> With this statement, Wilson implies that his interpretation of the epic still sustains the symbolic values of the Bugis culture.

Yet, Wilson notes, "[the story] is visual. We are not limited by the spoken word; even

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<sup>159</sup> "I La Galigo Berlabuh Di Makassar [I La Galigo Anchors in Makassar]" (Makassar, 2011), 33.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Tan Shzr Ee, "All His World's a Stage," *The Straits Times*, March 1, 2004; "I La Galigo Berlabuh Di Makassar [I La Galigo Anchors in Makassar]," 35.

<sup>162</sup> Ee, "All His World's a Stage."

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

when the ancient Bugis language is spoken, Indonesian people won't understand it."<sup>165</sup> Apparently, what he does not realize is that the transformation of the narrative from the Bugis oral tradition to the avant-garde performing art creates a gap. The oral tradition that the theater depicts is the oral performance whose transformative force does not rely upon how the performance makes sense to the audience, but how it provides a distinct sensuous experience through listening and watching. For the audience, the sound offers a pleasure, listening to the sound that is unfamiliar to their ears. On the other side, Wilson tries to maintain the 'local' view in which the *bissu*'s *massureq* (reading, singing the *I La Galigo* epic poem) is a performance of piety. It is represented in the way the *bissu* moves, sits, and finally reads the *I La Galigo*. The scenes portray that the relation between the *bissu* and the *I La Galigo* text is founded on a particular religiosity, the religiosity that is imagined still alive in the contemporary Bugis society, or at least among the *bissu*. But, as we learn from Salim later in our discussion, this religiosity no longer exists in the religious consciousness of the *bissu*, for now all *bissu* are Muslims.<sup>166</sup> And, among the majority of the Bugis people, *I La Galigo* texts are no longer considered sacred.

Wilson's visual collage of the Bugis traditions receives a number of critiques from the Indonesian artists. Among them, Ratna Sarumpaet gains more attention because of either her fame, her position as the chair of Jakarta arts council, or the significance of her critique. Let us focus on the significance of her critique. She writes:

[W]hen on stage we watch the *bissu* whose religion is Islam, which came to the region in 500 years ago, and the *Pakarena* dance that was invented in several decades ago, there is nothing I can say but "pitiful". . . . Using the *bissu* as an exotic instrument (again without energy) and deliberately ignoring the living tradition of *bissu* rites in the Bugis society are miserable.<sup>167</sup>

Sarumpaet's critique reveals that even with the intervention of modern theater, the artists must maintain the local cultural meanings and prioritize the spirit of the local culture. Even though she rejects exoticism, Sarumpaet suggests that the Bugis traditions are located in the pre-Islamic tradition.

In the article, Sarumpaet uses the word *energy* (energy) interchangeably with *makna* (meaning), *jiwa* (soul), *daya hidup* (vitality), and *roh* (spirit). She criticizes the lack of energy in the dancing movements, meanings in the visual representations, and the soul or the spirit of the Bugis in the theater. Within this context, exoticism that Sarumpaet refers to is an artistic practice and representation that prioritize visual pleasure over cultural meaning. Her comment on the *bissu* thus must be understood as an attempt to bring on stage what she calls "the Bugis spirit." This spirit is located not in the living Bugis people but in the Bugis ancestors who lived for many centuries before Islam came in the region. The Muslim *bissu* cannot embody the "Bugis spirit". At this point, we might reject her notion indigeneity in a way that it provides no place for the living indigenous people. Yet, Sarumpaet's view of indigeneity remains relevant in the contemporary indigenous narratives. The indigenous movements in Indonesia place indigeneity as a sovereign identity outside of the territory of the Abrahamic religions. Authenticity and locality are measured and maintained through the selection of traditions against Islam. Thus, it is strategic in creating a discursive space for the revival of indigenous people and resistance to the

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Muhammad Salim, "I La Galigo, 'Bissu', Dan Keberadaannya [I La Galigo, 'Bissu', and Their Existence]," *Kompas*, April 4, 2004.

<sup>167</sup> Sarumpaet, "'I La Galigo': Panggung Megah, Miskin Makna [I La Galigo: Glorious Stage, Poor Meanings." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Islamic conservatism.

However, we cannot extend Sarumpaet's understanding on indigenous identity to represent the everyday life of indigenous people, for it does not tell us the social reality of indigenous life. At this margin of social life, the question is not about how to sustain 'authentic' and 'local' traditions, but how to survive. Salim, a prolific Bugis scholar, writes in his response to Sarumpaet:

The authentic story [of *I La Galigo*] almost extinct and forgotten as well as outdated. It has died, no spirit. Fortunately, Rhoda Grauer, Bali Purniati, Robert Wilson, and Change Performing Arts give it a new spirit and enable it to recover and live again. Even, it flies around the world witnessed by its masters. Among the masters, there are those who feel thrilled, moved, with tears in their eyes, and those who envy and complain.<sup>168</sup>

Salim, who served as an advisor in the production of *I La Galigo*, rejects the authenticity of the *I La Galigo*, even points out the irrelevance of the story in the contemporary Bugis society. The spirit of *I La Galigo*, for Salim, no longer lives among the Bugis people. It takes a new form and meaning as it is adapted for the avant-garde theater. It now lives, as Salim implies, among the global spectators. In relation to the *bissu*, Salim asserts, "Nowadays, *Puang matoa* wears a Muslim cap and veil. Some of them performed hajj, even in their *bissu* songs written in the old Bugis texts, they use the names of the Islamic God, angels, and prophets. The *bissu* in South Sulawesi who can be counted by fingers are all Muslims."<sup>169</sup> Salim problematizes Sarumpaet's notion of 'Bugis indigeneity' by demonstrating that Islam is fundamental to the contemporary identity of the *bissu*. On the other paragraph of his article, he asserts that the function of the *bissu* has changed. Different in the past in which the *bissu* perform only rituals, nowadays the *bissu* perform for tourists.<sup>170</sup>

The local people who reject the participation of the *bissu* in the theater contend that by participating in performance arts, the *bissu* violate their ritual duty. They complain about the absence of the *bissu* during *mappalili*, especially those who are considered the high priests. They said that it is taboo for the *bissu* to travel during that time. The disintegration and the decline of the *bissu*, the local people asserts, is the consequence of the violation of the taboo.

The debate illuminates the indigenous positions of the *bissu*. The artistic intervention constitutes the *bissu* as a form of spectacle. The *bissu* is integral to the performance of the avant-garde artistic constellation in which cultural reference is no longer prioritized, except to provide unique theatrical experience to the audience. In the theater the *bissu* emerge in their "estrangement" to direct the audience's attention to a particular sensory mode. Their chanting in an old Bugis language, unintelligible, provides the audience with a unique musicality. Excitement and curiosity what the *bissu* apparently expect from their audience.

The *bissu* represent the exotic other that remains mysterious for the audience. The mystery is enhanced with the scenes in which the *bissu* emerge in the main stage. But, at this time, the *bissu* are performed by the male actors. The graceful movements they perform and the costumes they wear invoke that the *bissu* are transgender. Surprisingly, the projection of the *bissu* transgender identity has no textual supports from the *I La Galigo* text. In the text the

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<sup>168</sup> Salim, "I La Galigo, 'Bissu', Dan Keberadaannya [I La Galigo, 'Bissu', and Their Existence]."

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

highest rank of *bissu* is occupied by the royal women: We Tenriabeng and We Tenridio.<sup>171</sup> It is We Tenriabeng who leads the rituals, one of them is the ritual of cutting down the sacred tree (*welenrengeng*), the scene central to the theater. She is not portrayed as a powerful but beautiful woman. Why do then in the scene the transgender *bissu* replace the royal female *bissu*? In response to this question, I offer three reasons: The first reason is that the view that all *bissu* are transgender is well established and widely circulated on media; the second reason is that transgender *bissu* marks the distinct position of Bugis *adat*, different from the state and the Abrahamic religions, especially Islam; and the third reason is that transgender priests will be visually enticed.

## H. Dispossessed Body as Culture

Indigenous identity, I argue, is constructed in the production and consumption of images through repetitions and circulations constitutive of a distinct social reality that in the end shapes the mundane social reality itself. It blurs the authentic mediated images and the 'real' person or people. When people talk about authentic culture often what they refer to is the one recorded in film. Film instills culture. Culture lives without history.

Culture itself is a complicated concept invoking the politics of culture behind it rather than academic one. At the turn of 19th century, it has contradictory meanings: it refers to Western notion of progression, civilization, as well as critique against it.<sup>172</sup> Culture has two orientations: developmentalism (modernity) and conservatism (traditionality). As a Bugis man observes his own culture, I am proud of the culture and community where I grow up, I also question the static and the loss of direction and relevance that I find in the so-called "local (authentic) tradition," which has been pivotal in the contemporary multicultural project. The question is not how the culture is different, but how the culture is useful to the community today, and to what direction it leads to. Culture provides us a site to observe how power works, and how negotiation is made, and how conflict is resolved. But, for the purpose of the focus of discussion, let me extrapolate the direction of culture that performance and media lead to and the interests they serve. I will start with spectacle since in this mode of representation of culture, I find culture lose its social vitality and unexpectedly offers an alternative space for obsolete traditions to revive.

Spectacle alienates indigenous people, presenting them in their enchanting visual representations. The indigenous people we know suddenly become exotic and strange on our television. We suddenly realize that the people we live with have their own life on television, on papers, on the minds of the people that we never meet. They even more recognized and appreciated outside of their villages. They travel more frequently than the people who live in cities. All of these require us to create a new relation with the indigenous people. Tracing their images on the screen, we learn how they are related to the world, to the universal humanity, to the world culture, and the global social movements. Suddenly we realize we know them less – their neighbors even do not know if they still exist. We are struck how strange they are in the films, how different the life they inhabit, and how distinct the identity they embody. They become more interesting, and the 'reality' begins to unfold as we create the new relation. So, never too hustle to claim your position as an insider, or you might be surprised! We live in the

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<sup>171</sup> Rudolf Arnold Kern, *I La Galigo: Cerita Bugis Kuno [I La Galigo: The Ancient Buginese Epic]*, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1989), 34 and 304.

<sup>172</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1985), 89.

age of spectacle, to echo Debord, here our life is incoherent, fragmented into different subjectivities.<sup>173</sup>

The intervention of art makes trance accessible to secular spectators in the dismay of intimate religious patron-client relationship. The indigenous priests serving their clients are not different from the artists performing in front of their audience. Trance becomes a genre of performance that is potential to provoke sublime feeling for their spectators. For the community, it is crucial in maintaining the traditional hierarchy and authority of the performers; for artists, it is a means to provoke sublime experience.

The *bissu* embody transgender to show the role of the body as the site of culture, the culture that is tied to notion of spirituality and piety, yet this is only possible through art in which spirituality and piety are expressed in a secular understanding, the understanding that we find in the notion of the sublime. At this point, culture is never dissociated from art, culture is only possible through the art constellation, they share the same public space: secular one. They also share the same ontological ground, i.e.: estrangement. Culture and art are expressed in their estrangement of social reality or the present social context; culture and art become extraordinary, marvelous events.

The understanding of spirituality and ascetics offer an alternative embodiment of religiosity outside of religion, in the secular practices of culture and art. This is what is absent among the urban male transvestites (*waria*). *Waria*'s embodiment of transgenderism is not rooted in local culture. The norm they invoke is liberal one: freedom. The aesthetic that they promote is erotic and parodic therefore subversive to heterosexuality.<sup>174</sup> With this cosmopolitan identity, *waria* occupy a dilemmatic position in expressing their identity in the local cultural contexts; they find no local cultural repertoire to articulate their sense of belonging. They are alleged to be modern and Western cultural import. Fortunately, they have *bissu* to (re)claim their local root.

But, how do we analyze our relation with representations and identities? We cannot assess them against the mundane life, for the life on media is closer to the life of ritual. It has a particular norm, liminal space, and potential to transform and invigorate the banality of everyday life. The images that we see are the cultural and normative traits on which society is established.

The life on screen and stage in manufacturing empathy becomes so ideal that makes us wonder how such life is liveable. Yet, that is the progression we imagine to have. We might find the life we imagine is pristine and simple, but it reminds us that the progression we promote and worship is progression towards destruction. It demands us to hold our basic values, humanity, that we gradually lose in our real social life. They might be strange, the reason why we watch them; they might be the life of the other, the reason we are curious; yet the sufferings we see in their eyes, the compassion they display, the conflict they have to face, and poverty they endure are ours. The visuality of the indigenous people carry with them particular sentiments that mirror and critique our social problems, therefore they offer us a space of consolation and distance where we realize that our mundane life is so overwhelming that it is no longer liveable. It reminds us the moral life that we simply forget because we never look back. We learn this life

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<sup>173</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

<sup>174</sup> For further discussion on gender and performance, read Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 519–31.



from the stories of our nations that we build through images, imaginations.<sup>175</sup> "How strange it is," Anderson argues, "to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you."<sup>176</sup> And, surprisingly, he contends, "Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity . . . because it cannot be 'remembered,' must be narrated."<sup>177</sup> When the past becomes a collective dream, a myth to believe in, we will unite as a nation, as a community. And, on dream and myth the indigenous people such as the *bissu* depend for their survival.

## I. Domination of Sign

We arrive at this juncture and question ourselves, what kinds of life we want to live in? What life is liveable? Our everyday life is boring, overwhelming, mechanical, and disoriented; the life in media is marvelous, idealistic, gives us a sense of direction yet elusive. Let me pause here and digress to explain the complexity of the lives that we encounter, return to the topics again and move to the other topic that is very fundamental in both lives: economy.

In our contemporary world, we need a distraction from the banality of our everyday mechanical life. This need is not an intellectual but a physical one, from doing exhaustive repetitive task, as if we are actors do exhaustive rehearsal to be our different self, just for a temporal time - or not really. In our weekend, holidays and summer are our liminal times for pleasure. We go to theater, to mountain, to beach. These are the times that allow us to meet singers, actors, painters, magicians, priests, and strangers. Our conversation must be casual, humor is preferred. Through this interaction, for non-purposive purpose – pleasure – we interact intimately.

How do we feel if we are one of the *bissu* who perform in a hotel during summer? This is not a complicated question to answer. We pause not because we think, but because we have a mixed feeling about the value of the performance. We expect our performance to transform our audience, yet we also attempt to fulfill the audience's expectation: pleasure. We resist being identified as professional performers, but we do not have a distinct position that differentiates us from them. We resist saying we perform for money, but we complain when the 'salary' is less than what we expect.

When an old *bissu* told me that they do not like performance, since it makes them like a fool in front of strangers, I understand that they resist performing to please the strangers. Their performance is not for entertaining, but to transform life. Yet, for strangers, perhaps, seeing is already transformative, to regain their humanity. The appreciation of the *bissu* is more than what the *bissu* expect. During their performance of ritual of *loangang lino* (cleansing the world) in the 10<sup>th</sup> Festival *DeL'Imaginaire of Maison Des Cultures du Monde* in Paris and Aureillac, the *bissu* received standing applause. With their shy smiles, they received flowers from the audience, and panic when their audience gave them blank paper and pen. They knew what their audience asked for and they appreciate their request, they just do not know how to sign.<sup>178</sup> "The Western people appreciate our traditions, how could we, the natives, not do the same?" Wa Mina, one of the *bissu* who perform in the festival, asked.

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<sup>175</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Andi Ummu Tunru, an eminent South Sulawesi artists and the manger of the production of Dance des *Bissu*, Sulawesi del Sud in the festival, told me the story.

With this transformative interaction, with any consequence may emerge from it, we find contestation of the purpose of ritual – culture – and art. The neo-Marxist critique of modern culture is aimed at salvaging the role of culture to create meaningful modern life.<sup>179</sup> Media, theater and art have been the battle ground for the idealists and materialists. In the extreme case, we find that artists defend the autonomy of art: *Art for the Art sake*. Artists refuse to serve a particular ideology, or a particular social purpose. *Art for the Art sake*, Albert Guérard argues, "carries with it a rather pungent aura of 'Decadence: and Decadentism is not without fascination, especially for the adolescent mind."<sup>180</sup> Unfortunately, as he explains further, we leave art as manifestation of social critiques and engage 'deeply' with artistic – mathematical – mechanism. Art serves "absolute disinterestedness."<sup>181</sup> If painting, music, dance, theater are what we understand as culture, is this orientation of culture that we invoke? Do we discuss culture in terms of "awe-struck silence"?<sup>182</sup> *Art for the sake of Art* becomes a faith for atheists. It is where they find religion. "Art" for them, as Guérard points out, "is direct revelation,"<sup>183</sup> the revelation they receive through contemplation and trance.

With its conservative faith, art rejects to bow down to our modern idols: Science and Money.<sup>184</sup> What values does art offer us that are foundational to our social life? If it is a new religion, is it a religion for humanity, for sectarianism, or for individual selfishness? Again, is this the direction of culture that we lead to? If this is the case, we might have to listen to Feuerbach:

certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, this change inasmuch as it does away with illusion, is an absolute annihilation, or at least a reckless profanation; for in these days *illusion* only is *sacred*, *truth profane*. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.<sup>185</sup>

Feuerbach criticizes irrationalism in religion and its ignorance towards social problem. Yet, it is mythical experience that moves us towards a particular moral life. Is *Art for Art's Sake* "A way to escape, a counsel of despair, or a rule of life?"<sup>186</sup> If culture is represented – interpreted – through technical terms of art, for whose sake do the *bissu* perform on the avant-garde theater?

The consequence is predictable. We face the crisis of identity when we no longer recognize others and ourselves. Alas, we watch too much and read too much, we do not have time for intimate social interactions. We live with people who come and go in our life, too many people, too many meanings, and very little time. We build our life with this immediate and instant social interaction. This is the life that mediated by money; our social relationship is only possible through money network. We buy what we loose, not what we need; the loss renders us

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<sup>179</sup>Instances can be found in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, 2001, 41–72; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Psychology Press, 2002).

<sup>180</sup> Albert Guérard, "Art for Art's Sake," *Books Abroad* 10, no. 3 (1936): 263, doi:10.2307/40075400.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>185</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Houghton, Mifflin, & Company, 1881), xiii.

<sup>186</sup> Guérard, "Art for Art's Sake," 264.

to be possessive, possession of emptiness. We live in a melancholic life. And we expect strangers entertain and console us with their queerness and wisdom.

The dichotomy between utility and morality demands a dialectical moral register to resolve the guilty feeling. At this juncture, we know terms such as alms among religious people, cultural patronage among artists and scholars. These terms imply that money is a medium of the intimate relationship between the giver and the receiver; it is not an act of economic transaction but act motivated by humanity. This is the moment when money is not cursed, for it does not equate the culture with commodity, but it expresses the humanity that motivates the act of giving. It is conditioned with the absence of work, an alibi against money as a pure form of economic exchange. In the specific case of giving alms to the *bissu* for the healing rituals they perform, as I explain somewhere, the exchange is not seen as an economic one. Money is not equated with the service that the *bissu* perform but with the social status the givers occupy. However, in the case of cultural patronage where the purpose of ritual performance is motivated by science and art, it is hard to reject the notion that the performance is a kind of labor, for the ritual accumulates earnings from ticket or record selling. In the case of art, we find indigenous ritual becomes a signature of authenticity and through the touch of modern art, this signature turns to be the aura – the traditional authority – of indigenous people.<sup>187</sup> Yet, it does end here, we find "simultaneous double reduction," to borrow Baudrillard's term, where money articulates the symbolic value of the ritual, taste, and social position that the spectators occupy – not to mention that we find hierarchy in the seat rows, the signs of economic status.<sup>188</sup> The transmutation of money from exchange value to sign value is not something unexpected; it is what we witness in everyday life where spending is associated with compassion and wealth.<sup>189</sup>

In the case of the *bissu*'s performance in theater, we deal with a distinct form of labor, differentiation, and power.<sup>190</sup> Their sign values are produced not only by their position as indigenous priests, but also from the interventions of artists.<sup>191</sup> In their collaborations with artists, we find a distinct configuration of domination that runs in parallel with economic privilege and profit accumulation.<sup>192</sup> Here the domination possesses no causal link with economic power, yet it emerges through recognition of the autonomy of the *bissu* as an index of sign value (culture). Instead of transparent economic monopoly, we have monopoly of (cultural) signs in which, as Baudrillard argues, "Dominant classes have always either assured their domination over sign values from the outset (archaic and traditional societies), or endeavoured (in the capitalist bourgeois order) to surpass, to transcend, and to consecrate their economic privilege in a semiotic privilege."<sup>193</sup>

At this point then we turn our head to "general economy", to borrow Bataille's term, as a critique for production economy.<sup>194</sup> Since the inquiry into expenditure economy – exchange of symbolic value – is aimed at excavating the moral foundation of economy, for us the question is

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<sup>187</sup> Baudrillard discusses this form of exchange in *The Art Auction: Sign Exchange and Sumptuar*. See Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (Telos Press Publishing, 1981), 112–23.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1 (Zone Books New York, 1988).

not, as Bataille asks, "Why is it that people have always experienced the need and felt the obligation to kill living beings ritually?"<sup>195</sup> But, what is the moral consciousness the traditional communities and their spectators share that maintains a ritual performance does not fall into profit accumulation?

Our analysis on the dialectic relation between morality and economy comes with a caveat, as Bataille argues:

All efforts to autonomize this field of consumption (that is, of the systematic production of signs) as an object of analysis are mystifying: they lead to directly to culturalism. But it is necessary to see the same ideological mystification results from automizing the field of material production as a determining agency. Those who specify culture (sign production) in order to circumscribe it as super-structure are also culturalist without knowing it: they institute the same split as the cultural idealists, and constrict the field of political economy just arbitrarily. If culture, consumption and signs must be analyzed as ideology this is not achieved by banishing them, or expelling them to an outer field, but on the contrary, by integrating them into the very structures of political economy.<sup>196</sup>

In this sign enterprise, we depart from a rhetorical question Baudrillard asks: "why would the dominant class have need of culture if the economic is truly the determining instance?"<sup>197</sup>

What we trace here is the transmutation of money from index to sign and the "metonymic confusion" it causes, and the social context in which they exist. Let us begin with the differences of index and sign:

the index has an origin, the sign does not: to shift from index to sign it is to abolish the last (or first) limit, the origin, the basis, the prop, to enter into the limitless process of equivalences, representations that nothing will ever stop, orient, fix, sanction....the signs (monetary, sexual) are wild because, contrary to indices (the meaningful regime of the old society), they are not based on an original, irreducible, incorruptible, immovable otherness of their component parts: in the index, what is indicated (nobility) is of different nature from what indicates (wealth): there is no possible mingling; in the sign, which establishes an order of representation (and no longer of determination, of creation, as does the index), the two elements interchange, signified and signifier revolving in an endless process: what is bought can be sold, the signified can become signifier, and so on. Replacing the feudal index, the bourgeois sign is a metonymic confusion.<sup>198</sup>

Money is always bounded to the context of interaction and moral register in which the interaction is articulated. We look into, as Baudrillard and Barthes suggest, metonymic configuration of the relationship, instead of falling into a monolithic narrative of commodification that acknowledges no human agency and its vulnerability. Otherwise, as an interpreter of culture, our interpretation and representation of culture fall into the same ideological ground that we criticize. Transmission, circulation and transformation of values and

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<sup>195</sup> Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard* (Duke University Press, 1991), 55.

<sup>196</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 114.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Roland Barthes and Richard Howard, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 40.

the changes of moral registers are more important since it becomes the moment where we can observe the vulnerability of dominant culture under a particular moral condition. Money is not Midas' hands; it is a signature that replaces the fingerprint. It constitutes our presence, authority and identity. In the interpretation of money as an exchange in the ritual performance, we find the urgency to register the exchange under particular normative registers to prevent social shame. Yet, we find in the exchange, the construction of subjectivity in which all agents define their positions against the money they contribute and receive.

The shame that the *bissu* invoke in their economic interactions, I argue, does not correspond to the money but to the wrong value calculation of what the *bissu* deserve.<sup>199</sup> Money is cursed because it fails to bring the appropriateness of moral judgment of the givers, and on the other side, we find potential slippage in which the economic exchange renders the *bissu* fall into labor: an economic subject. This ambiguity occurs because money is an index of monetary materiality and a sign of symbolic meanings.<sup>200</sup> Bad calculation emerges from poor monetary calculation and moral judgment.

Money is the site in which differentiation and social relation are constructed. It has moral and emotional consequence as people through mediation of money come into contact. In money, we find two forms of relationship: intimacy and impersonal. In the *bissu* mediated interaction, resistance against money suggests the inability of money to accommodate the intimate social relationship between *bissu* and audience. This loss of intimacy creates a blasé attitude, to borrow Simmel's term,<sup>201</sup> in which the ritual performance does not delineate traditional authority the *bissu* expect. For the *bissu*, the alienated relationship with the spectators renders them fall into a modern labor.

This normative constellation limits the power of Midasian touch of money. In other words, money and human agencies share the same subject position. The contextualization we provide is not the constellation of the signified but of the signifiers in which, as Barthes demonstrates, "we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*."<sup>202</sup> With its plurality and indeterminacy, Voloshinov argues, "Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle," as we speak from the same signs, and refracted as sign serves different political interests.<sup>203</sup> It also suggests the social vitality of the sign, for, as Voloshinov indicates, "A sign that has been withdrawn from the pressures of the social struggle . . . inevitably loses force, degenerating into allegory and becoming the object not of live social intelligibility but of philological comprehension."<sup>204</sup> And, indigenous people and their tradition remain the sites where we rely upon in our critiques against the modern economic practice.

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<sup>199</sup> Webb Keane, "Money as Matter and Sign," *Etnofoor* 9, no. 1 (1996): 72.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>201</sup> Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby and Featherstone (United Kingdom: Sage, 1997), 178.

<sup>202</sup> Barthes and Howard, *S/Z*, 5–6.

<sup>203</sup> V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik, *Studies in Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1986), 23.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Four

### Behind the Scene: the *Bissu*'s Struggle to Survive

#### A. *Bissu* and *Adat*

In *The Last Bissu*, Andi Mappasissi, a descendent of Bone King, says: "During the kingdom, there was an enormous rice field behind the palace. It was only for the *Bissu*. They supported themselves from that land. Now it belongs to the government. The *Bissu* wonder about seeking alms [my translation: they wonder to earn living]" The euphoria of *bissu* has passed with the death of Saidi in 2011. The *bissu*, when I conducted my field research from 2012 to 2014, lived lonely without media attention. The relic house was empty - only the regalia with dust lived there, and *puang matoa* position was vacant. I was told that I came in the wrong time, when the activities of the *bissu*'s activities declined; when I was not welcomed by *Puang matoa* in the *bola arajang*. But, it was the right time, when the *bissu* struggled to survive.

In this section, I am concerned with the loss of the direction of culture we find on media. I question the relevance of the 'backwards' orientation of culture, but on the other side, I find possible recuperation and reconstruction of cultural wisdoms relevant to our modern life. Yet, our concern with culture as the idea of progression and civilization should not blind us with the other process of culture; commodification of culture. While we might be skeptical about the survival of authentic culture, culture is never separated from material condition. The problem that I attempt to solve in this discussion is not whether or not economy shapes culture or vice versa, or whether or not economy and culture are two distinct and autonomous fields; but how indigenous people position themselves and others when they receive payment to perform. In previous discussion, we look into how meanings are constructed through a constellation of affect where we find stories and images are arranged in a collage. Alienating, entertaining, provoking, they constitute a moment of reflection, where the strange cultural practices we see become a moment to think of our own subjectivity, our own culture. Coming from the culture I observe, I redefine my position as an insider. On the other side, I question how the community takes advantage when their village becomes the site of world destination, when their traditions are well recorded in the world libraries.

The *bissu* in the contemporary narrative is identified as *adat* community. The scholars of *adat* use *adat* in reference to a system of norms and etiquettes rooted in local customs, and to a system of traditional law and governance that regulates the social interactions in indigenous communities.<sup>205</sup> When the activists of *adat* mention *masyarakat adat* (*adat* community) they refer to a community that has distinct culture, sovereign land, subsistence-economic orientation,

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<sup>205</sup> Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, trans. Richard James Wilkinson (late E. J. Brill, 1906); Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (October 1, 1966): 1–24, doi:10.2307/3350753; P. Burns, "The Myth of Adat," *J. Legal Pluralism & Unofficial L.* 28 (1989): 1–127; J. B. Kingston, "Manipulating Tradition: The State, Adat, Popular Protest, and Class Conflict in Colonial Lampung," *Indonesia*, no. 51 (1991): 21–45; Jamie Davidson and David Henley, *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics: The Deployment of Adat from Colonialism to Indigenism* (Routledge, 2007).

and autonomous governance.<sup>206</sup> Based on this definition, the identification of *bissu* as an *adat* community is problematic. The *bissu* do not live in an *adat* land, therefore they do not share the problem of *adat* communities such as land loss and resettlement, and the narratives of self-sufficiency, subsistence economy, and resistance to globalization and capitalism. The *bissu*'s professions such as traditional wedding planner, cook and healer are not limited to serve rural communities.

*Adat* in the colonial and the national politics has been deployed to legalize the state's practice of inequality and injustice against villagers.<sup>207</sup> *Adat* law is enforced to those considered local commoners, while the Dutch law is applied to the local elites living in the urban centers.<sup>208</sup> In this state's policy, the rights of indigenous people as citizens were not recognized.<sup>209</sup> The autonomy of *adat* that the Dutch colonial and Indonesian state grants has been beneficial more to the state than to the indigenous communities, for it legalizes the state's practice of unpaid labor and monopoly over the rural natural resources.<sup>210</sup> For this reason, it is not coincident that the establishment of *bissu* as an *adat* institution occurred in 1931 during the period of the Great Depression and in 1999 during the Asian economic crisis.

It is in the village we find the class conflict rampant,<sup>211</sup> in Indonesia in particular between elites and peasants, the state and indigenous communities, corporations and indigenous communities, indigenous people and Muslims, to mention a few examples. In the colonized Indonesia, the Dutch maintains the traditional social structure to regulate agricultural industry and to alienate Islam from indigenous life.<sup>212</sup> In the contemporary debate on culture in Indonesia, we find the reminiscence of the Dutch colonial politics of tradition in which Islam is considered to be antagonistic to indigenous traditions. Village is a contact zone, to borrow Mary Pratt's term,<sup>213</sup> where we can trace how tradition, colonialism, Islam and modernity interact and constitute conditions of possibility for the emergence of dynamic - often incoherent - indigenous identity.

Having explained above, I am still convinced that *adat* is the only means that the *bissu* employ to survive. The *bissu*'s interactions with the local clients, the state and global culture industry, as well as their representations on mass media and performing arts demonstrate that the *bissu* transgender priesthood serves as a trope of indigeneity, the trope mediated by the modern artistic constellation of estrangement and orchestrated by the colonial, capitalist and

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<sup>206</sup> They refer to indigenous people defined by the United Nation, International Labor Organization, World Bank, and AMAN (the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago)

<sup>207</sup> Kingston, "Manipulating Tradition: The State, *Adat*, Popular Protest, and Class Conflict in Colonial Lampung."

<sup>208</sup> Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Duke University Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> For further information, read Kingston, "Manipulating Tradition: The State, *Adat*, Popular Protest, and Class Conflict in Colonial Lampung"; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Nottingham, England: Spokesman Books, 2011).

<sup>212</sup> Kingston, "Manipulating Tradition: The State, *Adat*, Popular Protest, and Class Conflict in Colonial Lampung"; Harry J. Benda, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," *The Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 4 (1958): 338-47; Abdullah, "Adat and Islam"; Leonard Y. Andaya, "Kingship-Adat Rivalry and the Role of Islam in South Sulawesi," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 1984): 22-42; Davidson and Henley, *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics*.

<sup>213</sup> Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone."

multiculturalist desire for an exotic and sovereign traditional community. The *adat* - the indigeneity - the *bissu* provoke does not delineate the *bissu* as a sovereign traditional community, instead it provides a discursive and social space where the *bissu* exists outside of the heterosexual normative territory of the state and Islam. It emerges within economic networks that permit interventions and negotiations. It subverts the essentialist and monolithic representation of indigenous people centered on the imagined sovereign territory.

## B. *Bissu*: a Community?

When I arrived in Segeri<sup>214</sup> on September 2012, I found the *bola arajang* (regalia house) was empty. Nika, a 38 year-old *bissu*, told me that it was the *bissu*'s leader who was supposed to receive me, but the position had been vacant, and no one was available to take over the responsibility. Later, I was told this was happened for two reasons: the position has been cursed – those who held the position suffered and died; second; and the position after the death of their charismatic leader, Saidi in 2011, is no longer paid by the local government. The house used to be the *bissu*'s 'office' to receive visitors and researchers has been abandoned. Finding no body in the regalia house, Nika contacted each *bissu* via cell phone and explained my intention to meet them. From Nika's house, which was located close to the Segeri market, we drove about forty minutes to one hour to the other *bissu*'s houses. This was the average distance for each *bissu*'s house we visited in that day. The *bissu* live in the different districts: Pangkajene, Labakkang, Ma'rang, Segeri and Mandalle. Most of the young *bissu* live in the suburbs close to the markets or inter-province roads, while the old *bissu* live in the areas isolated from the main settlements. To reach the old *bissu*'s houses, we have to walk on the narrow paths, with the rice and fish ponds on their sides. This pattern of settlement reminds me of Claire Holt's story when she drove from Makassar to Segeri to record the *bissu* ritual dance in 1938:

As the motor car traversed the country, its aspect changed into vast stretches of flat green rice-fields. Within these fields, at seemingly regular distances from each other, stood large Buginese family houses on high piles. None of them had any sort of yard or garden, or even a few trees near them. The carpet of young rice shoots seemed to continue and pass under the dwellings and between the piles. The whole looked more like a big parade of houses on a vast green field than a settlement. One could not, at any rate, call it a village.<sup>215</sup>

I share Holt's first impression during my first visit. The distance apparently creates a sense of lack of liveliness and social interaction among the *bissu*. Later, Nika told me that they (I use *they* in reference to transgender *bissu* – in Indonesian language all pronouns are gender-neutral) rarely met the other *bissu*. The *bissu* gathered in the regalia house only when they received invitations to perform and when they hold the rice planting ritual, *mappalili*. Kirma, a woman in her 60, told me that the reason why the *bissu* lived separately in the isolated areas was to hide from DI/TII.<sup>216</sup> Many of them were killed during the repentance operation (*operasi toba*), a witch-hunt operation led by Kahar Muzakkar, the leader of DI/TII in South Sulawesi, in 1960s.

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<sup>214</sup> Segeri is a district of Pangkep regency located around 47 miles from Makassar, the capital city of South Sulawesi.

<sup>215</sup> Holt, *Dance and Quest in Celebes*, 28.

<sup>216</sup> Darul Islam/ Tentara Islam Indonesia (Islamic State/ Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia) is an Islamist separatist movement founded in 1949 by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewirjo. It aspires to establish Islamic Indonesian state.



### C. Priest of Crisis

As I describe in the other chapter, the *bissu* danced during the inauguration of Andi Mapanjoekhi, the king of Bone,<sup>217</sup> in 1931.<sup>218</sup> After 25 years of exclusion, *bissu* was recognized as a royal institution. Again, in 2001, the *bissu* danced in the inauguration of their new leader, Saidi.<sup>219</sup> It was the outcome of the long process of the recruitment of *bissu* new members from 1998. Saidi was officially appointed by the government and *adat* council of Segeri. The restorations of the *bissu*, occurring in different years, show similarities. They happened during economic crises: The Great Depression and Asian economic crisis. During those crises, the *bissu* were incorporated into the national economic recovery project in their position as a state bureaucratic apparatus and as culture (art) workers. This bureaucratic role is not new to *bissu*. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century *bissu* was a bureaucratic – spiritual – position. Antoni de Paiva, a Portuguese tradesman, in his letter written in 1545 to King John III of Portugal, explained that before his conversion to Catholicism, the king of Siang<sup>220</sup> (currently Pangkep regency) had to consult with the *bissu*.<sup>221</sup>

*Bissu*, according to the Segeri people, have a significant role in determining the cycle of rice plantation and harvest, through *mappalili*. While the Bugis texts and de Paiva never mention *mappalili*, it is interesting to bring up some coincidences suggestive of the intricate relation between politics and religion. In 1667, after the VOC and its ally, Arung Palakka (the king of Bone), defeated Gowa (currently Gowa regency), they annexed Segeri to Bone.<sup>222</sup> Segeri and the other colonies were called *palili*. *Mappalili* is derived from the same root of *palili*, which in Bugis means rice farmer or land. Central to the performance of *mappalili* is *rakkala*, the sacred plough. It is believed that the *rakkala* has spiritual power to fertilize rice field. According to the local story, the sacred plough belonged to the Bone kingdom. It was missing during a big flood. Forty *bissu* were sent to search for the sacred plough. The *bissu* finally found it in Segeri, but the king of Segeri rejected to return it. Failing to persuade the king, the *bissu* finally decided to stay in Segeri to take care of the sacred plough. Currently only in Segeri, the *bissu* perform *mappalili*.

In contemporary Pangkep, I find that the *bissu*'s role to maintain the Bugis *adat* corresponds to their effort to sustain the economic relation with the communities and the global community of spectators. This is crucial for the *bissu* to resolve their decaying tradition and poverty, and to maintain their position outside of the modern labor practice. With the intervention of the state in which *adat* is incorporated into tourist industry, the struggle of the *bissu* to proclaim themselves as an indigenous religious community becomes complicated. The enforcement of strict code of conduct causes many young *bissu* leave and join the urban homosexual groups.

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<sup>217</sup> Bone is a regency located in the east coast of South Sulawesi, around 118 miles from Makassar, the capital city of South Sulawesi.

<sup>218</sup> *Inhuldiging van den nieuwen vorst van Bone, Andi Mapanjoekhi te Watempone op 2 april 1931 [Inauguration of the new prince of Bone, Andi Mapanjoekhi, in Watempone on April 2, 1931]*, Documentary (Amsterdam Koloniaal Instituut, 1931).

<sup>219</sup> Grauer, *The Last Bissu: The Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*.

<sup>220</sup> Currently, it is named Pangkep regency, one of the regencies of South Sulawesi located in the southern Sulawesi peninsula, about 31 miles from Makassar, the capital city of South Sulawesi.

<sup>221</sup> Jacobs, *The First Locally Demonstrable Christianity in Celebes, 1544*, 290.

<sup>222</sup> Maddusila A.M., “Silsilah Rumpun Keluarga We Tenrileleang Sultanah Aisyah Matinroe Ri Soreang [The Family Lineage of We Tenrileleang Sultanah Aisyah Matinroe Ri Soreang]” (Indonesia, 1998), 158.

#### D. Priest of as You Wish

All *bissu* are breadwinners. They own or rent houses and adopt their siblings' children. A few of them live with *to boto*.<sup>223</sup> They profess as *sandro* (traditional healer), farmer, beautician, *indo botting* (traditional wedding planner) and *sandro mappakiana* (traditional child-birth attendant). The jobs, as they tell me, require spiritual and traditional knowledge. "This is why we are different from *calabai*," said Nika. "When we do makeup, we chant to make the bride looks more beautiful. In choosing colors for the wedding gowns and altars, we are very careful, because the colors indicate the social status of the bride," they added.

The *bissu* gain their acceptance from their economic interaction with their clients. With the service they provide, the *bissu* interact with the community without any normative obstacle. Through this professional interaction, the *bissu* becomes a part of everyday life in Pangkep. Yet, outside the economic interaction, the local people's attitude towards the *bissu* remains ambiguous. This happens to Nika when a royal family (*arung*) asked for their service as an *indo botting* for their daughter. Nika received it as an acceptance of their transgender identity, even though they were still confused with the family's acceptance. The *arung* family, according to Nika, is conservative. "I am the first *calabai* comes to the village wearing a long dress," Nika says.

In performing their jobs, the *bissu* do not determine the price – except the works they do in their salons. It is the clients who determine the 'price'. They call this *cenning-cenning ati* (literally means as you wish). In this economic transaction, money does not function according to the capitalist logic in which money is viewed as a medium of exchange, but as representation of social class of the givers. The act of giving must follow a procession. It requires that the givers show respect to the *bissu* by putting the money on the ceramic or silver plate with betel leaves and an areca nut. When the money is given, the giver must bow their heads and shake the *bissu*'s hand with their both hands. The *bissu* receives the alms. In this economic interaction, the *bissu* maintain their sovereignty by rejecting to equate their service to money, and enforce the money to be the representation of the social class. Therefore, in this context, it is the givers who have authority to determine the 'price', and it leads to shame if the 'price' they offer does not fit within the social status they are expected to occupy. They might offer more but not less. For those who do not have royal lineages, they can move upwards in the social hierarchy when they offer 'high price'. *Cenning-cenning ati* creates a social ground in which the *bissu* and their clients interaction cannot be viewed merely as economic but both economic and ritual interaction that determines the social status of the *bissu* and their clients.

In contrast, the *bissu* find it is inconvenient, scandalous to conduct economic transaction in art productions for two reasons: they have no direct interaction with their audience, and the 'salary' they receive is the payment for their performance. Spectators come and buy ticket to watch the *bissu*'s performances. The ticket price and salary of the performers is determined not by the audience but by the culture industry agent. Money becomes scandalous in the absence of direct interaction between the *bissu* and audience. It creates distrust between the *bissu* who perform the job and the event organizers who receive the ticket payments. Among the *bissu*, it becomes the source of disintegration and conflict, since the money is distributed equally regardless of the social status of the *bissu* – those who perform occupy different social status: *puang matoa* (the highest rank in the *bissu* hierarchy), *puang lolo* (the second rank) and *bissu*

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<sup>223</sup> The common translation of *to boto* is professional helper or assistant. But, in the *lontaraq* (old Bugis texts), it means soul mate.

*mamata* (novice *bissu*). The *bissu* expect that the salary must represent their social status. The higher status they have, the higher salary they expect to receive. Yet, this is not how money functions in the cultural events; money serves as a medium of exchange.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, the *bissu* also complain about the low salary they receive. During my interview with Japa, a *bissu* in their 60s, complains: “Watched by the crowd, we look like fools. Our bodies hurt,<sup>225</sup> and we are paid only for 50,000 or 100,000 [in rupiah]. I would rather do my current job or the other jobs than fool myself.”

Mediation is not transparent. Trust relies upon the mediator as a moral agent. Yet, one cannot guarantee morality under secrecy and in the absence of legal mechanism. Even to ask how much the salary before the performance, the *bissu* are already questioned for their genuine motive to perform their social – ritual – obligations. Secrecy is another word of scandal and fertile site of mistrust. It is silent, but its symptoms are visible. Internal competition and conflict are two instances that are more visible and damaging. This situation is unavoidable since money economy has already subjugated every aspect of our modern life. Our professions are our identities – it is what Burke calls “corporate identity”.<sup>226</sup> Corporate identity guarantees access to economy. In the scheme of the mediated interaction, *bissu* are not artists, therefore the access towards the economic access is limited – they do not possess the property right of their works, they do not have equal payments as artists, their creativity is not seen as a product of their intelligence but as nature, as their culture, therefore their products are considered not having aesthetic values but historical and cultural values, the aura that makes the aesthetic value of art works are not reproducible.<sup>227</sup>

Ritual as a form of performance is profitless. The relationship between the performers and spectators are not utilitarian but intimate where the spectators participate through paying alms. They share the objective of the rituals to transform and regulate life. They share the religious motive of the rituals. performer is chosen among the community who has charisma. This understanding of ritual has to be revisited since in many cases, ritual is performed outside of ritual time due to the demand of spectators. In this context, ritual as commoditized performance becomes a surplus economic value, since the performers still constrained within their religious consciousness do not – are not allowed - determine their prices. Consequently, traditional authority of priest gradually declines. The economic interaction between ritual performers and spectator community is mediated by cultural agents. Within this interaction, guilt often emerges, but tradition has to prevail. To cover the guilt, we find a new moral term such as cultural patronage, multiculturalism, and heritage that share the profitless motive of ritual, but at this time ritual often has no local social relevance to the community and often the side impact of tradition protection project, prioritizing tradition over community, leads to disintegration of traditional community as internal competition and conflict becomes inevitable. Trust and community building are often not the main priority in heritage and multiculturalist projects. As the profitless

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<sup>224</sup> For more discussion on money in capitalist society, see Barthes and Howard, *S/Z*; Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 174–85; Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>225</sup> The performance Japa refers to is *Ma’giri* in which the *bissu* drill their daggers on their palms, stomachs, and foreheads.

<sup>226</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 264.

<sup>227</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (Random House, 1968), 217–52.

motive grows, tradition will not sustain amid the decline of social cohesion in traditional communities. Worse, government's political and economic development decisions are not based on understanding of local traditions, causing the dependence of traditional community to the government. This is what happens to the *bissu*. In the aftermath of their participations in the cultural events in Indonesia and around the world from 2001 to 2011, the *bissu* are left to resolve their internal problems: competition, conflict and disintegration. In response to these problems, the *bissu* call for return to their spiritual root, but poverty not spirituality is the real problem the *bissu* face in their everyday life.

## Chapter Five

### Different Fields, Different Stories

#### A. *Bissu* and Transgender Identity

In recent years, we witness the rise of anti-LGBT movements in Southeast Asia. From government officials, politicians, athletes, to religious clerics, we hear that the main reason of the rejections of LGBT people is that they deviate from the moral standard. On the other side, tolerance towards LGBT people is often used to assess freedom and democracy in Southeast Asia. The LGBT issues in Indonesia offers us an interesting case. Homosexual right movements and Islamic conservatism, which is now synonymous to terrorism, spring at the same time during the euphoria of freedom in the aftermath of the fall of the New Order in 1998. Indonesia is praised for the implementation of democracy during the transition from the authoritarian regime of the New Order to the democratic government of Reformation Era. On one side, in the Indonesian national narrative, Islam serves as a political slogan for a clean government, on the other side, Islamic conservatism is blamed for the rise of terrorism. Freedom and security are aimed at mobilizing political sentiment against Islamic conservatism, thanks to the mainstream media. On the other side, the radical Muslim movements use media to propagate anti-Western sentiment. Muslims face a dilemmatic position when it comes to the issues of implementation of freedom and democracy in their countries. Within this global context, the main narrative we heard and read that unless Indonesia is secular, liberal, and democratic, there will be no space for transgender, transsexual people among pious Muslim communities. Or in other words, the more secular, liberal, and democratic the society is, the more tolerant their attitude towards transgender, transsexual people. And, the US and Europe are taken for granted as a model. These views explain why the critiques against secularism, liberalism, and democracy among the LGBT people in the US and Europe remain unheard in Indonesia. Moreover, the sources of violence and the priority are different. The LGBT right movements in the US and Europe criticize the liberal notion of sectarian identity, capitalist mode of labor, racism, religious conservatism, and prejudices that become the source of violence against LGBT people, and prioritize social justice and equality in their political demands. In Indonesia, LGBT movements point out religions, Islam in particular, as the main source of violence, and prioritize freedom to allow them to have a social space to exist.

The question that intrigues me is not how the mainstream narratives orchestrate the debates on and the experience of the LGBT people in Indonesia, but what kinds of life the Indonesian LGBT people live in, and what kinds of political and cultural resources are available to them. In relation to this question, *bissu* becomes significant since it constitutes a normative and cultural space for the existence of the Indonesian LGBT individuals.

In this chapter, I lay out the stories of the *bissu* based on the two years of field research. They are not the stories of clash of civilization but underprivileged citizens who try to survive in the modern capitalist society by strategically deploying the natural and cultural resources they possess. Like LGBT people in the US and Europe, in their stories we find interesting entanglements between the body, identity, and their experience as citizens and religious individuals.

In recording their stories, I deployed a different ethnographic approach. I did not come with the list of questions, but participate in casual conversations, gatherings, and rituals. The stories that I tell you in my interaction with the *bissu* are like our casual stories: incoherent and inconsistent. Often people forget the stories they tell us, and repeat the stories with different twists and emphases. The stories underscore incoherency as a site in which we can observe the dynamic and fracture of identity itself.

Transgender identity, as most queer theorists – the proponents of Judith Butler in particular – suggest, is visual. It demands a distinct strategy of narrative in which the visuality of the transgender provides us a window to understand a particular desire and sentiment on which indigeneity and transgenderism are founded. It is the affect of visuality and transgender performance that I attempt to expose in my narrative. In its absence, it animates ethnographic writings.

I attempt to expose this silent affect as a trait of identity in which I myself as a researcher in my interaction with the *bissu* occupy a particular subjective position. The affect I attempt to represent in the ethnographic narratives is oriented towards revealing normative and cultural constraints that limit intersubjective interactions. In my narratives, you will observe two central themes, my relationship to the *bissu* and the transformation of the relationship. They will reveal not only how the *bissu* and I have the capacity to act and react in particular ways, but also the capacity to select temporal moral grounds in which we occupy temporal subjective positions. The intersubjective interactions reveal that even though we have institutionalized moral and cultural values determinative to our actions, but it is our social interaction that circumscribes the social manifestation of the values. Or to put it concretely, the values serve as matrix of institutionalized discursive potentials, and we have capacity to select the potentials to build our social relationships – our capacity to recognize and to be recognized, our "capacity to affect and be affected", and "our capacity to exist."<sup>228</sup>

The intersubjective – phenomenological – narrative I employ in telling the stories of the *bissu*, invoke how different fields of interests collide and how interpretation intervenes to understand what I observe in the field, and what nuance we give to a particular mediated representations. This serves as a point of critique against the failure of the scholars to take into account their interactions with their observed communities. The interaction is a precondition integral to ethnographic narrative.

Geertz reminds us that "the line between mode of representation and substantive content is as undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting."<sup>229</sup> And, "It is not against a body of uninterpreted data . . . that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers."<sup>230</sup> But, who are the strangers? Do they remain strangers for the scholars who live with them for at least one year? And, what is the scientific imagination? What kind of power does it possess? Geertz writes from the lenses that culture as symbolic system might manage to defend his scholarship against those who questions the validity of his interpretation. But, I would say that the observed communities do not remain strangers, and we do not remain a disciple of the "strange" culture. The dynamic interaction between researchers and observed communities must serve as contextualization, as an integral part of our "scientific imagination," echoing Geertz, to allow

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<sup>228</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Univ of Minnesota Pr, 1987), xvii.

<sup>229</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 16.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

our readers to assess the validity of our interpretations and representations of the communities we observe. The interaction reveals selective discursive and institutional resources available to us and how we employ them.

I scrutinize the foundation of the mediated representations of the *bissu* on the main stream media and scholarly works by demonstrating that the *bissu*'s resistance against Islam, modernity and heterosexuality serve as strategic narratives of difference that have historical root in the colonial and postcolonial politics. I underscore that Islam, modernity and heterosexuality are integral elements in the articulations of *bissu* identities. The underlying reason of the invisibility of Islam, modernity and heterosexuality in media is that the cultural identity the media construct has its distinct features located outside of ordinary life. It is rooted in colonial politics in which culture manifests in its exotic – sublime form. Even though this notion of culture has been critiqued as we find in the works of Williams and Clifford,<sup>231</sup> I find it perpetual in the contemporary scholarships for two reasons: the political intervention of hegemonic culture and the monolithic view of cultural identity.

In the stories, I try to capture and display how the *bissu* deal with Islam, modernity and heterosexuality. If the *bissu* manage to sustain their traditions, how do the traditions look like outside of the stage performances and media? If they resist Islam, modernity and heterosexuality, What kinds of Islam do they embrace? What kinds of professions do they do to earn living? And, What kinds of household do they live in? We need to revisit several basic questions. Does transgender matter most to the *bissu*? Does transgender serve as a trope of spectacle, a discursive strategy or a social resource? How do the *bissu* embody transgender in their everyday life? What are the normative underpinnings and cultural practices that constitute *bissu* transgender priesthood? These are the problems I try to understand as a scholar, but on the other side, I assume these problems are not urgent among the *bissu*. Thus I let the *bissu* speak in the stories, to bring their voices and agencies alive, and to allow readers to observe how the *bissu* live in their everyday life; what problems they face, how they resolve them, and how the problems shape their traditions and identities.

The stories are not easy to place within the above dichotomies. The stories are not the stories of clash of civilization, or class conflict. They are the stories of underprivileged citizens who try to survive in the modern capitalist society by strategically deploying the natural and cultural resources they possess. This chapter focuses on how the *bissu* struggle, negotiate and sustain their identities amid their decaying traditions and disintegration of their community. Through ethnographic narratives, I lay out the ground of *bissu* indigenous identities.

The contradiction and incoherence in the narratives are inevitable as we struggle to manage the discursive developments to be oriented to a certain projection of identities. Through this transformation - either my transformation from outsider to insider, from a student of culture to an expert of culture - cultural identities remain vulnerable, yet the vulnerability of the identities on my side were more on epistemic concern as I try to explore identities in terms of how they are constructed based on particular cultural traits; but on the *bissu*'s side, the vulnerability is more than epistemic or discursive concerns Their vulnerability is fundamental to the survival of the *bissu* - it is their right to live. And the right to live is not something that we can reduce it to a monolithic narrative of embodiment a particular identity. The embodiment itself serves as a site in which institutionalized normative system, and cultural and economic practices intersect and grapple one another. In telling the stories, I try to give the tones to reveal

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<sup>231</sup> Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary"; Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism - Cambridge Journals Online."

the feelings of urgencies and threats, to allow readers to observe what kinds of priority that the *bissu* emphasize in particular contexts.

The incoherence reflects the *bissu*'s anxiety, and diverse subjective positions. They do not try to resolve the incoherence, for it is strategic to survive amid their decaying traditions and disintegration of their community. If there is one thing left that is tie them together as a community is the violence they silently endure; the violence that teaches them to stand on their feet and take responsibility on their own destiny. They might reject to acknowledge their weakness, but what we know for sure is that those who incite violence are those whom they love: their parents and relatives; the institutions where they find their existence: the *bissu* and traditional organizations; and the violence that is provoked under the name of the religion that they embrace since they were born: Islam.

The stories reveal the identities of the *bissu* are founded on two different understandings of *bissu*: *bissu* as a transgender ritual role and transgender identity. In the stories that I lay out, we find this understanding overlaps, suggesting that the *bissu* do not differentiate their ritual role and their transgender identity. This articulation of identity is not distinct, and it is not specific to the traditional context, even I would say it is a product of our corporate modern culture.<sup>232</sup> Thus, *bissu* is more than a transgender cultural identity; it is a social status, a social role, a traditional institution, and a solution to the poverty to marginal local transgender people.

The *bissu*'s Islamic piety is incoherent with their stories of violence where they were oppressed and killed because their practices are considered heretic. Yet, we find the *bissu* involve in the Islamic festivals, and work with imams in social and ritual events. The history of violence against *bissu* must be revisited, since it occurred during the colonial and early post-independence period, and the colonial and global political intervention is rarely, if not at all, in the discussion of hostility between *adat* and Islam. The hostility can be misleading if we observe it as an isolated local or national case. The sectarian sentiment it provokes indicates that the hostility is not limited to local or national territory, but it emerges under the influence of global politics: colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, socialism, and pan-Islamism. In everyday life, the relationship among *bissu* and Islam and modernity are not always antagonistic but dynamic, and through this relationship, we find diverse strategic subjective positions that the *bissu* occupy.

Six *bissu* in the pseudonyms: Nika, Ciang, Rusda, Mina, Ina, and Japa in this chapter represent the *bissu* generations and their different views on tradition, religion, and modernity. The old *bissu*, concerned with the gradual declining of the spiritual traditions among the young *bissu*, call for the return to *bissu* asceticism. On the other side, the local young transgender people find that *bissu* is the solution to their marginality, since *bissu* has a distinct social status. Yet, they resist *bissu* asceticism. As the life in their villages get tougher and hostile to them, they move from their villages to suburban areas, nearby inter-province roads and traditional markets. They struggle and gradually adopt modern life. Their stories are incoherent, containing desperate cultural and moral values. On the other side, we find the rise of concern among cultural activists, artists and scholars over the declining of the *bissu* membership. This coincides with the spring of homosexual organizations after the downfall of the New Order regime in 1998. In the stories, we find the *bissu* differentiate themselves from urban transgender groups and homosexuality, yet in everyday life, the life of the *bissu* and urban transgender people intersect. Even during the euphoria of *bissu* from 1998 to 2011, transgender people find

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<sup>232</sup> For further discussion on corporate identity, see Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 263–72.



participate in *bissu* rituals and performances. The urban transgender groups find their cultural root in *bissu*.

There is no hatred and revenge in their stories, for those who persecute them are the people they love: their parents and relatives, and the institutions where they find their existence: the *bissu* and traditional organizations; for the violence that is provoked under the name of the religion that they embrace since they were born: Islam, and for those who manipulate them are those who feed them: government, social organizations, artists and cultural activists. Their identity reveals both who they are and with whom they engage. Scholars of Queer theory and intersectionality will find the *bissu*'s intersubjective and strategic identities familiar on the one side, but surprising on the other side, since they pose critical challenges to liberal notion of identity founded on mourning, subversion, difference, and exclusion.

## **B. *Bissu* Nika**

### **1. Festival of Maritime Culture in Makassar**

On November 11, 2012, Hadi, a colleague of mine, a professor at a University in Makassar, informed me that he organized a national cultural festival to commemorate the national maritime day, and asked me if I would come to see the preparation and met the *bissu*. The festival, funded by the national government, featured the indigenous performances from the eastern region of Indonesia. When I arrived at the Museum *I La Galigo*, also known Rotterdam fort, a traditional wedding was about to begin. I thought it was a rehearsal for a performance, but I was informed that it was a real wedding ceremony, but I did not know whether it was a part of the festival, and I did not ask the question since it was irrelevant to my research. I took a seat next to Hadi and joined the conversation.

"It is not simple, since each procession has a symbolic meaning. I am not surprised if people leave their traditions," a man in his 60s told us, while still giving short instructions to a woman and the drummers.

Hadi and I went to the room where the *bissu* stayed. We did not meet the *bissu* since we were told that they were performing *maddupa* (burning incense) to ask permission and protection from the spirits. We then walked to the exhibition hall. When we entered the hall, two men were working on completing the main stage, the altar. A woman in her 30s greeted us. "This is Nika," Hadi said. I shook the woman's hand and realized that Nika was a 35 year old self-proclaimed *bissu*. Dressing in a red stripe-black blouse and black tight knee-length pants, Nika moved in so graceful but not pretension manner that I felt I talked to a woman, not a transgender person. Nika were relaxed and comfortable to talk to me and often cracked jokes during our conversation. Nika spoke to me in Indonesian and to their helpers in Bugis, even though I introduced my self as a Bugis. If I was not previously informed about the event, I would say that Nika decorated the hall for a Bugis traditional wedding ceremony.

"It is unfortunate you come when the *bissu*'s activities decrease and we are facing many problems," Nika said. "But, we can go to wedding parties," Nika added quickly. Nika was right. In the previous years, the *bissu* participated in many events, from local rituals to international festivals. They were also featured in several documentary films.

"Problems?"

"Yes," Nika replied. I did not rush them and remained silent, waiting for their further explanation.

"I can't explain but you will know when we meet in Segeri," Nika responded and walked to the altar, giving instruction to the helpers. The decoration, Nika explained, was traditional and had to be carefully arranged. "If I make mistakes, the people would say I do not know *adat* [custom]!" Nika said. The hall was provided for painting exhibition.

The day after the opening ceremony, December 6, 2012, the picture of the *bissu* performing in the front yard of the museum covered a half page of the culture rubric of *Fajar*, a local newspaper, with the big title: "*bissu* Ritual Inaugurates the Culture Festival of Makassar Strait." What surprised me not that the *bissu* performed with their unique costumes and makeup, also not that they performed their agricultural ritual in the festival of maritime culture, but the first paragraph that explained the performance. It wrote that the inaugural event of the festival was the ritual performed by the *bissu* from Barru, a neighbor regency of Pangkep. I thought it was misprinted or the reporter received wrong information. The *bissu* in the picture lived in Pangkep. Among the *bissu* shown in the picture were Wa Mina, Mak Rusda, and Ciang.

Since then Nika became my main respondent and informant. Without their help, it was hard to contact and locate the *bissu*. They did not live in the same neighborhood. The average distance among the *bissu*'s houses was thirty minutes to one hour by car. We had to contact them through cell phones to find out where we could meet them. Some of the *bissu* we met during the end-year rituals (*temmu taung*). The *bissu* settled mainly in three districts the Pangkep regency: Segeri, Ma'rang, and Labakkang. Outside of Pangkep, there are three regions where I visited the *bissu*: Wajo, Soppeng, and Bone. These regencies were known as rice granary areas. I focused my research in Pangkep because Pangkep was considered the center of *bissu* activities. And, only in Pangkep, the *bissu* performed the annual rice planting ritual (*mappalili*).

I visited Nika's house several times before I began my field research. "Come next week, we will meet the *bissu*," Nika told me one day.

## **2. *Temmu Taung* in Labakkang**

I came on the following day, November 29, 2012. When I came, Nika was chatting with a customer in their salon, and asked me to come in and introduced me with the customer, a lady that Nika addressed with *puang*, a title for royal descendents. "This is inappropriate to meet the *bissu*," Nika told me, pointing their *daster*, a casual, long dress worn by Bugis women at home. As Nika left the room, the lady told me that she came to ask Nika to be the *indo botting* (traditional wedding planner) for her daughter's wedding. She knew Nika really well and the quality of their service. After saying that, she asked for permission to leave. As she left, Nika came out and asked me to move to the living room, and told me that they would be ready soon.



Fig. 1. Nika is working in their salon. Photo by the author.

Nika lives in an old two-store traditional Bugis wooden house. Their house was located nearby the traditional market in Segeri, the only market in the district. A huge crowd and traffic jam was what I saw every time I sat in Nika's front porch. On the first floor were located two rooms: the salon and the living room. In the living room, on the wall the picture of Nika and their *to boto* in traditional Bugis costume was hanged. *To boto* literally meant partner or helper, but since the term created many rumors and conflicts among the *bissu*, you had to read Nika's explanation later in this chapter. With the blue and white background, Nika and their *to boto* were posed in the posture familiar to local new brides. Nika wore a yellow *baju bodo* (a traditional short-sleeved, brodered blouse used in Bugis-Makassar traditional weddings and other traditional events) and a purple-white stripe sarong. Their long black hair was arranged in a simple bun. Their bright, white makeup and red lipstick looked elegant. Nika turned their left side to the camera. On the back, standing their *to boto*, wore a Bugis cap with golden stripe, a suit, and red-black stripe sarong. His right hand holds a kris suspended on his belt.



Fig. 2. Nika and their *to boto*. Courtesy of Eka Kahar.

Nika came out, dressing in black tight knee-length pants and white-black flower blouse with a white-green stripe sarong on their hand. "I have to wear sarong when I meet them," Nika said, fixing her pony-tail hair. Nika called Marus, their *to boto*, to bring the car. On their cell phones Nika was talking with Mak Rusda and Wa Mina, two *bissu* that Nika told me as the old and charismatic *bissu*, and Sandro Isah, Mak Rusda's helper. Nika prepared the offerings, which contains betel leaves arranged in a circle at the edge of a silver saucer, and in the middle of it laid an areca nut and an envelope of money. Several bunches of banana were placed on the table next to the saucers. Our offerings were complete.

"You have to use sarong when you enter their regalia rooms," Nika told me, handing me a sarong. "Let's go," Nika said as we saw a mid-sized Toyota Hilux truck parked on the street.

We went to Sandro Isah's house where the ritual of *temmu taung* (the end of year) would be performed. After we passed the bridge of the Segeri River, we turned right and stopped at a derelict wooden stilt house. The house looked like a meeting hall, with a large front veranda and a small room on the back where the *rakkala* (the sacred plough) was placed.

"This is the regalia house, it was abandoned now," Nika said, breaking our silence. We just stopped for a couple of minutes and moved. In the car Nika told me that it was the leader of the *bissu* (*puang matoa*) who were supposed to receive researchers and guests. After Bidin, the well-known and charismatic *puang matoa* (*bissu* leader) passed away in 2011, the old *bissu* were reluctant to take over the position. Some of them were only temporary leaders. One of the temporary leaders passed away on September 2012. I heard the death of the *bissu* leader when we were searching for a house to rent a week before. We were surprised, in our desperation to find a house, a middle-aged man offered us the regalia house, which my wife spontaneously

rejected it. Nika told me that the position of *puang matoa* was cursed. "You're lucky, you meet me, it's hard to find them," Nika abruptly changed the topic.

As we got on the car I showed Nika the letter of concern and explained the purpose of the letter. They told me that I was not the first researcher who came to Segeri, the *bissu* knew the letter, but they had their own way dealing with researchers. "They do not need the paper, they need you to perform *mangolo*," they said. It was a ritual performed in front of *bissu*' regalia to ask for permission from spirits before conducting any activity. I was anxious but curious about how a researcher performed *mangolo*.

We arrived at Sandro Isah's house, a wooden stilt house with brown rusty tin walls. The house was unpainted, the only color visible from outside was brown rust. The house was located in the middle of fishpond. On the wooden pillars, the damages because of water and termites were clear, but still looked strong enough to support the house. As we ascended the stairs, I heard light squeaks. I saw the neighbor houses; they looked like floating logs on the fishpond ocean.

"Assalamu alaikum," we said as we entered the house.

"Wa alaikum salam," the people in the house responded and asked us to take seats. We sat on the floor, next to the door. In the middle, Mak Rusda and Sandro Isah were seated. Behind them was a queen-size bed with steel frame, where the offerings were arranged. We were seated in circle. There were only three small windows where the people crammed. At least thirty people attended the ritual of year end ritual. I saw only five men among the crowd. The heat from the wall behind me was almost unbearable. Fortunately, there were many nail holes on the wall, enough to soothe my back. But the heat, I thought, was not the only reason why the people did not lean against the wall. The wall looked fragile.

"He is a researcher from a university in America, but he is Bugis - Makassar. He has traveled far just to return and study his own traditions. He visits us today to meet us, *bissu*," Nika introduced me.

"Many people forget us, we are still here," Said a woman wearing a veil, sitting next to Mak Rusda.

I shook their hands. Mak Rusda, a 75-year old woman, asked me to sit next to her. She explained the purpose of the ritual. The ritual was performed at the end of the year to express their gratitude to the God for the blessing and the success of their plantation and fish farming.



Fig. 3. Mak Rusda at the year-end ritual (*temmu taung*). Photo by the author

As Mak Rusda was preparing the ritual, I returned to my seat besides Nika, and prepared my camera and voice recorder. Mak Rusda spoke in soft voices, with her smile, very polite and humble. She dressed in a modest way with red blouse and white headscarf. I understood why the people called her Mak, mother. Nika told me that Mak Rusda was the only female *bissu* among the dominant transgender *bissu*.

Nika introduced me to Wa Elling, a transgender *bissu* in their 50s, and Isah, a female *sandro* (healer) in her late 40s; she was sometimes called as a *bissu lolo* (literally means young *bissu*), a position for those who had not completed all *bissu* training. But, Isah was different from the other young *bissu* in their 20s or 30s. She was not identified as *bissu mamata* (novice *bissu*) since like the old *bissu*, she had a regalia room in her house and performed healing. Isah wore a white veil and sarong. She rarely talked and her sharp eyes always gazed on the floor steadily. She was apparently disengaged from the crowd. Elling was a stern man with short hair, a narrow, oblong face with angular cheekbones, pointed chin, a sturdy jaw line, and deep-set eyes. He remained silent almost all day, I remembered he smiled and talked once, as Nika teased them. But the way Elling moved and walked with their gangling body, with their swaying hips appeared not prominent as people expected from a transgender person. One had to feel immediately from Elling the air of suffering and poverty.

The women were busy in arranging the plates. Each plate covered with banana leaves contains a glutinous rice cake wrapped with coconut leaves, *apang* (a traditional cake made from palm sugar and rice and served with shredded coconut), a white candle, and a thousand rupiah currencies (one cent in US dollar). These were alms from the women who organized the ritual. Two women, which Nika call them *dayang-dayang* (maids), in their 50s, helped Mak Rusda to prepare the ritual. They laid down two pieces of clothing, yellow and red, and placed

two bunches of banana on them, and stack several white and red candles in the banana and lit them. The white candles, a woman told me, were made from kapok and candle nut, grinded until it turned into sticky dough and put on a bamboo sticks. The red candles, which were usually used on graves, were regular candles that people could buy in stores. Two long pillows covered with red praying mat were placed next to the yellow cloth. This was where Mak Rusda laid her *alameng*, a kind of long sword used only for a ritual.

I gave an offering to Sandro Isah. She asked me to follow her to a small room, located between the living room where the ritual was performed and the kitchen where the women were busy preparing the feast. Nika rushed behind me to hand me the sarong I forgot on the floor. "You have to wear this to show your respect to the regalia!" Nika looked upset. The regalia room filled with aromatic smoke from the burning incense in a earthen bowl. The smell was familiar to me, since many Muslims including my family, burnt incense during the ritual of first day and the last day of Ramadan (fasting month). Sandro Isah sat down next to me, facing the offerings placed on a bed. We sat on the floor facing to the altars. On our left side, a small altar adorned with red and yellow ornaments and a royal canopy. Isah was chanting, and a woman sitting next to me told me that the spirit that lying on the bed was her grandmother's spirit. Isah hit the floor and turn her face to me. She was in trance.

"Remember!" Isah said, gripping my knee. "Remember, Remember!" I felt her outrage. I tried to understand what she meant. Her face turned from dark to faint, then smiled. The woman told me it was done, we had to leave the room. We went out from the room. *Mangolo* was performed to receive permission to enter the *bissu's* life, the life that belongs not only to the living *bissu* but also to their ancestors' spirits. My status then, as Nika told me, was no longer an 'outsider' but an 'insider'. I became what they called as *tau makkasiang*, a servant. Mak Rusda addressed me with "*ana*" (son).

Isah turned on the lights, the ritual was completed, and we left the house, before it was getting too dark. There were no street lights. "Remember! Remember!" Isah's word was still echoing in my mind. Yes, I remembered the first week of my arrival in Pangkajene, the capital city of Pangkep. When I looked around, searching for a house to rent around Pangkajene, to live close to the *bissu*, a woman asked me about my activity in Pangkajene. I told her that I conducted research on *bissu*.

"What is *bissu*?" she asked. I was surprised since I did not expect the question from a woman living in Pangkajene. I received a similar response from the driver I hired, a resident of Pangkajene. I hired him because I believed he knew everything about the area.

"Don't you know *bissu*?" I asked. With his curious face, he said no. After my brief explanation, I told him that when I talked to the colleagues of mine in the United States, I did not need to explain, they knew *bissu*.

"So, they still exist?" He still did not believe my explanation.

"Yes, we will not visit ghosts," I teased him.

What is *bissu*? Why did the local residents of Pangkajene ask the question? Were the *bissu* only a media spectacle? Who cared if the *bissu* vanish? Did it mean that culture meant culture when they occupied a space outside of ordinary, everyday life? Then, the only spaces for culture to 'survive' were the archives and media? Did I have to cease my field research and pursue my data on archives and media? These questions had lingered in my mind. But, what kept me going was that, Raymond Williams came to my mind, it was a critical moment when my research moved beyond the spectacle of the transgender body. Reflecting on Judith Butler's performativity of gender, the significance of my research relied upon on the notion

that it was not how you moved and how you looked, but why you were hated, harassed, killed, because the way you moved and looked. It was not merely the construction of the transgendered body itself, but the normative constraint that the body disrupts and the violence it causes. Based on this view, I would no longer question why the *bissu* identity on media was constructed under the narratives of survival, oppression, and violence. I had a simple question in my mind: how the *bissu* live in their everyday life. To answer this question, I did not need a list of questions but listen and watch.

The Toyota Avanza crossed the Segeri river ridge where the elementary school kids amused the passerby by their back-flip jumping. I knew they were elementary school kids not by looking their endearing grins on their innocent faces, or I could be wrong since not all happy kids in Segeri went to school, but from what I saw on the pavement: the scattered red shorts, white shirts, red hats, white shoes, and backpacks. I asked the driver to stop and took my camera to take their pictures. We left the bridge, hearing the kids asking for more pictures. I waved and smiled at them, hoping that their mothers did not know what they did after school. Yes, I still remembered the first week of my trip to Segeri.

### **3. Year End Ritual in Punranga**

On December 26, 2012, Nika and I attended the same ritual, but this time in the house of Ita, a woman in her 50s. Her house was located in the rice farming area in Punranga, a village of Labakkang district. Along the way to Ita's house, laid an uninterrupted rice field. The red, white, yellow canopies, the laughter and clatter, and the smoke, I said to my self, it was more than a mundane rice harvesting. It was a ritual of happiness.

"This year, the farmers are happy. That is why the ritual of temmu taung is performed, for celebration," Ismail, the driver told me.

"Yes, right, celebration, that is a nice term for ritual," I replied. I think there was a good reason to celebrate, since farming became harder with flood during the rainy season and water shortage during the dry season. The farmers had to buy water, not with cash but with a quarter of their harvest. To survive, some of them even had to mortgage their farms, and worked as sharecrop farmers on their own farms.

The car ran smoothly on the narrow asphalt road. We left the farming areas, and entered a housing complex. Following Nika's Hilux, we turned right at a stilt house and parked. The house was similar to Sandro Isah's. The wall and the roof were unpainted crinkled tinplates. The contrast was only the "color", the wall was silver, and the roof brown and rusty. A white mini-pickup truck and a red Yamaha scooter parked under the faded-blue tinplate-fenced terrace. Two men sat on the terrace, smoking. Near the stair, two teenage girls and a middle-aged man sitting on a wooden bench smiling and welcomed us. I saw as we stepped up on the stairs pores on the wooden stilts and the frame that termites and water created. But, the people seemed not concerned. Nika introduced me to Ita, the home owner. We were seated in the living room. The wooden floor was covered with brown, tile-motif plastic carpet. Again, I had to cope with the heat of a tinplate house. As I was taking a glimpse on the wall behind me to search for holes, but at that time, unfortunately, I found none. The tinplate wall reminded me of my experience in a building-supply store. I went to the store to buy wooden planks to cover the well in our rented house for the safety of my sons. The seller suggested me to buy tin plates rather than to waste money on planks just for a well cover.

"Even the kapok planks are more expensive than the tin plates!" he said.



"You don't like money?" I teased him.

"See, I have many customers because I'm nice," he replied and laughed. I was convinced and bought the tin plates. I knew from the experience that tinplate was not an expression of a modern aesthetic taste but a sign of poverty, of a social class: the peasants. It was also a strategy of survival as the resources around the villages became not accessible and affordable, the peasants use cheap modern products.

We were welcomed by Ita, dressed in yellow and white stripes blouse and red and light brown batik sarong with a white veil covered her head. In her modest appearance, she was very articulate. She felt comfortable to talk to anybody among the crowd, even to a researcher like me, whom she met first time. Nika in the ritual event served as an interpreter since some of the guests did not understand Bugis.

The banana and coconut leaves, and yellow fishpole bamboo planks were scattered in the living room. We finally found seats next to the two women in their late 50s, holding sticks and drums. I heard that Nika, in Bugis, told them about me. She smiled at me and talked to me in Bugis, which I replied in Bugis. They laughed. "Yes, I have a different accent," I told them. And, I explained to them that I was born in Southeast Sulawesi, to Bugis-Makassar parents.

"So, we play?" asked the two ladies. Not waiting for Nika's response, they hit the drums. The music they played energized the people in the room. Nika and others responded by moving their hips and laughing. Nika took *gamaru* (ceramic bows used to call spirits) and rubbed them together, creating a sharp friction sound. I did not expect Nika playing the *gamaru* in the ordinary situation, since they were used for spirit calling and exorcism. The other women joined and played the other *bissu* ritual instruments: *kancing* (saucer-sized cymbals) and *lae-lae* (fringed bamboo idiophones). The rhythm became faster and louder. "More!" a young man yelled. The drummers increased the tempo. "More!" the crowd became more enthusiastic. The drummers laughed and put their heads on the drums, exhausted. We laughed, while our drummers were messaging their hands. I could not believe the women in their late 50s could beat the drums for thirty minutes with such an energetic rhythm.

The drummer ladies moved, followed by the other people to the middle corner of the living room, where Sandro Isah and Wa Elling were preparing the offerings. A woman cut the banana leave, making circle shapes. Sandro Isah and Nika arranged three colors of glutinous rice arranged in circle with black glutinous rice in the middle, white, and yellow on the outer circle. Isah created dots with oil at the four corners outside of the circle with her right pointing finger. She placed the rolls of betel leaves on the top of the glutinous rice, an egg on the top of the betel leaves, and two pieces of *apang* on the left and right side of the egg, and *onde-onde* on the sides. Nika explained to me the arrangement and the symbolic meanings of the offerings. Nika showed me the two rolls of betel leaves. As Nika gave them to me, I realized how rolls were carefully folded in diverse shapes. "They have different meanings," then Nika showed me and explained one by one their meanings. *Koko' paluttu* (flying bird) have two different direction, the one that flies to the upper world and the other to the under world; *masulekka* (crossing leg) means that we, Muslims, must sit with crossing-leg position - the position that we use during Islamic rituals; *aleppu* (simple, straight) means honesty; *ruko cuco* (a shape like snail) means life circle. There is only one shape that Nika paused and asked Isah, "What is it?"

"*Kota' massusung* [overlapping box]," Isah answered, still focusing on arranging the plate.

Nika continued their explanation, "[social] life has different levels, low and high, but we, human beings are equal, we are *pada-pada rupa tau* [we have the same face, human face]."

Nika's phone rang, and at this time, they could not just ignore it. They answered the phone, gave the instruction to the caller how to get to the house.

"Did you know who called me over and over again?" Without waiting for my response, they added, "my client. His wife wants to divorce him. He wants to learn *cenning rara* [a seduction chanting] to make his wife love him again. We, *bissu*, use it to seduce our audience during our performance, not in a sexual manner, but in a spiritual one. That is why more people want to see our performance, because they are seduced!

"What do you mean by spiritual way?" I asked.

"Don't you see the *bissu* do not look like *calabai*, they are not lousy. They have charisma," Nika's answered.

*bissu* suffered but survived. They were hunted and killed by the *gerombolan* [literally means mob but in this conversation, it refers to the radical Muslim separatist militia led by Kahar Muzakkar] because they were considered heretic. They escaped and brought their regalia. Nika's face turned serious.

"She knows the story, because she experienced it," said Nika, pointing to a woman. The woman smiled and nodded. The woman, Nika told me, was nine years old at the time and witnessed the killings in 1960s. She explained she was terrified, ran and never looked back. She walked hundreds of miles, carrying with her several regalia wrapped in a sarong.

"Could you imagine a nine-year old girl walked hundreds of miles?" Nika asked. I knew the *bissu*'s previous stories on newspapers, films and blogs, that they were killed when they were caught performing their rituals, *mabissu*. Bidin in Rhoda Grauer's *The Last bissu*, said that to save their life, they had to perform ritual in secret. Many of their regalia were burnt.

"*Calabai* (male transvestites) are not *bissu*, but all *bissu* are *calabai*. *bissu* is different from *calabai*, since they have ritual and social function in the local community," Nika said. *Calabai*, as Nika often explained, cannot be attributed to *bissu* since *calabai* is already a derogatory term. Unlike *bissu*, *calabai* are seen as *maccola* (crude). I heard this many times from the *bissu* and those who know *bissu*, but I felt that this statement was not meant to exclude female *bissu* such as Mak Rusda and Sandro Isah, but only to emphasize the distinct position of the *bissu*, whom were mostly - or popularly known as – a transgender subject, thanks to the media.

"But, researchers sometimes only know us as *calabai*," Nika added.

"Most *bissu* aspired to performing hajj!" Nika said when I asked about hajj. "But, just see what was happened to them," Nika said without further explanation. I waited, but Nika remained silent.

"What was happened?"

"You can see by yourself," Nika repeated, politely rejecting to give further explanation. I read from the local newspapers and articles and heard the complaints from the other *bissu* that the *bissu* who performed hajj changed. They showed lack of interest on *bissu* rituals. Some of them even no longer participated in *bissu* rituals. Because of this, they were cursed; they did not live longer after their return from Mecca. But, their complaint had to exclude Sake, the leader of *bissu* before Bidin, and the other *bissu* who remained committed to *bissu* after performing hajj.

We did not realize three hours had passed. The living room was clean and ready for the ritual performance. The feast plates were arranged on tin trays. The plates covered with banana leaves contained traditional cakes made from glutinous rice: *apang*, *dange* (a traditional cake made from palm sugar, shredded coconut, coconut milk, and glutinous rice, wrapped in banana leaves and grilled on wood briquettes), glutinous rice cakes wrapped with palm leaves, and

*onde-onde* (a glutinous rice balls with palm sugar inside and covered with shredded coconut). The trays were arranged around the *walasuji*. In the *walasuji*, a bunch of banana, glutinous rice cakes, and *ketupat* (a glutinous rice cakes wrapped with square-knitted palm leaves, often used as the symbol of *lebaran*, celebration after the fasting month) were beautifully arranged and covered with a banana leave. At the edge of the *walasuji* were hanged two pieces of fishpole-bamboo logs used as cups, filled with pink arrack. An imam, a man in his mid 60s, entered the living room, took a seat near the *walasuji*. Two women unfolded a yellow cloth whose both ends tied to four poles (*lellu*). Ita and a woman behind her held one pole, a woman on the other side held to poles. The yellow cloth functioned as a canopy for *walasuji*. As the canopy was unfolding, the men at the corners hit the drums. The imam was citing his prayer silently. Nika, Sandro Isah, and Wa Elling stood up, danced and circled around the *walasuji*. The imam completed his prayer, the yellow canopy was folded, and Nika, Sandro Isah, and Wa Elling returned to their seats. The two men kept beating their drums. The imam moved to the left side. In front of him two tin trays containing banana and candles. They were placed on the pillows covered with blue praying mats. Ita lit the candles. The imam took an earthen bowl of the burning incense and circled it over the tin, citing his prayer in whisper. On the right side, Sandro Isah waved her hands, danced followed the rhyme of the drum. Her dance turned rougher but the imam, preoccupied with his prayer, was not disturbed. She screamed and pointed to the *walasuji*.

The imam continued his prayer, undisturbed. Sandro Isah's face turned ferocious, she was in trance. The imam completed his prayer. Sandro Isah remained in trance, and pressed her fingers on the floor. Ita, Nika and Elling took seats besides her. The people moved to take a close look. The drum continued, faster and Sandro Isah, still sitting, moved her hands and head in the same rhythm of the drums. Ita talked with her, in Bugis, to appease her. In the loud noise of the drum, Ita asked Isah, the spirit, what he or she wanted. Isah with a stern eyes looked at Ita who were still smiling and patiently waiting for answer. Nika bent to Ita and talked to her. Nika withdrew and leaned against a curved-wood beaufet behind them. I could not hear their voices with the loud drum. Appeared panic, Nika patted consolingly Ita on her back. Ita, with her smile, kept talking with the spirit. The imam, sitting calmly on Isah's left side, look at Isah pressing her fingers on the floor. Suddenly Nika and others yelled and asked for a cup of water. A cup of water was brought to Isah, placed on the floor, rather than using her hand to pick up the glass, Isah bowed and drank from the floor. Ita picked up the glass and help Isah to drink from it. Isah drank a little, and Ita followed, drinking from the same glass. Ita kept talking to Isah to appease her, and Isah responded by raising her hands, spread her hands, looking at the roof, citing her prayers, and put her hands on her chest then on her stomach. She then turned calm, and the drums stopped abruptly.

The imam, Ita and the women holding the poles moved to the regalia room. I felt hesitant to follow, but Nika and Ita asked me to follow them. In the room, a tray of offering was laid on a bed. On the top of the offering, several red candles were beautifully arranged. On the left side, an earthen water jar was filled with water and the flowers from palm trees. With yellow and green colors, they looked enticing. Ita asked me to light one of the candles. I went close to the offering, suddenly I felt the temperature increased. I blamed the flaming candles and burning briquettes in an earthen pot with their smoke filled in the room, without realizing that the three-meter square room was overcrowded. The people came near the door to see the ritual. I took one of the candles and lit it. But, placing it back to its place was not as easy as I thought. I tried several times, but the candle kept falling on the tray. Ita and Nika tried to help me, my face and

t-shirt were all wet. Finally, after my several hard attempts, the red candle stood up beautifully in its place in the middle. The imam took a seat near the bed, the altar. Completing his prayer, the imam received a black hen. He sliced the hen's comb, it clucked. Finding no blood, he repeated, and wiped the hen's blood to the offering and to the wood pillar of the bed, the altar. The imam moved to the earthen water jar, took the palm flowers, and sat facing the people, put the jar in front of him, between him and Ita. All of the women accompanied Ita, wore white veils. On Ita's back, a woman hold *lellu*, spreading above Ita's head. The imam recited his prayer, completed it, he again changed his position, facing the earthen jar. He held flower on his left hand and *alameng* (sword) on the right hand. Raising the sword above his head, waving it, he recited his prayer. Ita and the other women in the room remained silent. Putting down carefully his sword then the palm flower back into the jar, the imam closed the ritual.

Moving to the living room was a huge relief. I saw Sandro Isah and Wa Elling entering a room next to the kitchen. They returned wearing the *bissu* ritual costumes, ready to perform *ma'giri*.

Sandro Isah wore a silky red tunic, yellow sarong, black shawl, and a kris suspended on her belt. Down her legs, black pants with golden and silver stripes were visible. Her hair was covered with a maroon clothing completed with yellow and red plastic flowers. Wa Elling wore the same costume, the difference was only the color. Wa Elling wore silky silver costumes, and their head scarf was red with green, pink, and yellow ribbon flowers. Unlike Sandro Isah's head scarf, Wa Elling's covered only the top half of their hair.

"Come on!" I heard Nika's voice. A Tionghoa (Indonesian Chinese ethnicity) man followed them.

"This was my client," Nika told me in Bugis, I shook his hand.

"You should come too," Nika asked me to follow them.

We went to the same room the *bissu* used for their preparation. There was a bed covered with a mosquito net. Nika sat with their crossing legs on their right side and the man sat down in front of them. After reciting their chanting, they lowered the mosquito net. But, they were still visible. After silent, Nika asked the man to repeat the chanting, in whisper not to be heard by people outside. The man repeated. Nika blew the man's head and Nika wiped their face with their hands. The man, holding an envelope on his hands, shook Nika's hands, bowing down. "Use it for something good," Nika said. They opened the net, and we returned to the living room where Sandro Isah and Wa Elling were ready for *ma'giri*.

A group of people brought the *walasuji* to the rice field behind the house. It was already dark outside. They returned and joined the people who were enthusiastic to see *ma'giri*. The lights were on. The men bit the drums, the *bissu* raised and danced. The dance began with slow movements, it appeared like a rehearsal. There was like a gestural communication between the *bissu* and the drummers. The drummers kept the slow tempo and waited for the *bissu* to prepare. The drummer increased the tempo, the *bissu* responded by moving faster. Their graceful movements turned to be wild ones, but still controlled. They unsheathed their krises, and ran around the central pole of the house, where a young palm tree placed. The imam also stayed to see the ritual. They stomped their feet on the wood floor, and pierced their krises to their palms, throats, and foreheads. Wa Elling put their kris on the floor, pressed their chest to the kris, lied down on his back, pierced their kris on throat, span their bodies. Sandro Isah walked around, pierced her kris to her neck, moved her head up and down, her hands held tight the kris and twirled, and her feet kept stomping the floor, making loud noise, shaking the floor. The

drummers reduce the tempo, the *bissu* regain control of their movements. I took a deep breath, a huge relief.

On the front porch, people were laughing. Nika's client's face blushed. "Wow, it is very strong! I drink, but this is unbearable to me!" He passed the cup over the cup of the pink arrack to the a man next to him. "You come here, far away from Palopo, by bus for six hours only to suffer?" the other man teased him. He smiled, took a cigarette and smoked. We were sitting there until the living room was cleaned.

#### 4. Nika and *Bissu* Rusda

On December 2012, we visited Mak Rusda's house in Labakkang. Her house was located in an isolated compound, at the corner of a trail in a plantation. Rusda's house was a tin stilt house painted in blue and green. Rusda welcomed us, dress in a white blouse, purple sarong, and white headscarf. The people looked comfortable to talk with her. She spoke with soft voice and friendly smile. I did need to ask why people addressed her with an intimate address: *mak* (mother). She was 75 years old.



Fig. 4. Mak Rusda's house. Photo by the author.

When we visited her, she was preparing for the ritual of *songka bala*. She welcomed us and asked us to take seats in the family room. Nika told that we were welcomed not as guests but as family. The three women in their late 50s who joined our conversation told us that they came to participate in the ritual. One of them, Mak Rusda's relative, had just arrived from Palopo, a regency located about six to seven hours by bus from Pangkep. The women told me that since they received blessings from Mak Rusda, they felt their life went easier. A woman

told me that her oldest son just began his first semester in a university in Makassar, another woman told me her son worked a company in Makassar, was accepted at a university in Makassar, the other woman told me that her oldest son had just bought house and moved to Palu, the capital city of Central Sulawesi, wiping her face with her hand to hide tears at the corner of her eyes.

Mak Rusda took care of Nika's regalia, a kris. They did not have enough knowledge and spirituality to keep it in their house. And, Rusda is the right person, besides her deep knowledge, she was patient and disciplined. The kris had been in the hands of Mak Rusda for nine years. It used to belong to Arung Palakka. Nika went to the regalia room, and returned to us, saying that the spirit was still there. Mak Rusda nodded and said with grin that the spirit had his own place. The spirit was the incarnation of Arung Palakka, the famous king of Bone who allied with the Dutch to fight against Hasanuddin, the king of Gowa.

The *bissu* had a distinct role, different from *sandro*. Rusda and Nika explained that there were two kinds of *sandro*: *sandro pammana* (*sandro* of childbirth) and *sandro malasa* (*sandro* of illness). People were often misled as they saw that *bissu* performed *massandro* (healing). "Not all *sandro* are *bissu*," Nika said.

Rusda told us that the procession of *songka bala* was simple, there would be no *ma'giri*. To perform *ma'giri* needed a complicated preparation. One of them was spirit calling (*maddewata*). To perform *ma'giri* in festivals required *maddewata mamata*, where the *bissu* performed *mapisabbi* (asking for permission) or burning incense in the presence of spectators, and perform *ma'giri* when they felt the presence of the spirits. To perform *ma'giri* in rituals requires a series of procession such as *madekko ota* (betel-leave folding), *ota mapisabbi* (betel-leave offering), *mangolo* (meeting with spirits) and *maddewata* (spirit calling) -- usually the *bissu* lied down on the floor, some of them covered their faces with sarong, and chanted until they were in trance, a sign that they received permission to perform *ma'giri*. Nika told me that the *bissu* performed *maddewata penno* before their performance in the festival in the Museum of *I La Galigo*, also known as Fort Rotterdam. I recalled when Hadi and I planned to meet the *bissu* a day before the performance, but we were not allowed.

I was about to ask why the *bissu* performed *maddewata penno* in the festival, but Rusda stood up and went to the front porch, followed by her helpers, two women in their 60s. One of them brought a small palm leave basket with popcorn and an oil bottle in it. The other carried a tin tray covered with a yellow cloth, placed the tray on the floor and took off the yellow cloth, and left. In the front porch I saw palm leaves scattered on the floor and a big plastic bucket of water with pop corn and leaves in it. Rusda took the bunch of banana from the tray, brought it close to her mouth, and chanted, waved it around over the bucket, put it down inside the bucket, and took her *alameng*, pushed the banana inside the water, and moved it around. As Mak Rusda was sheathing her *alameng*, the woman talked with Mak Rusda; they smiled. Rusda took the water with her right palm and washed it to her neck. The woman also took the water, washed her neck and face.

We returned to the family room. Nika searched a *paccoda*, an octagon wooden log wrapped with bright yellow cloth. Mak Rusda did not know where she kept it. Nika found it, hanged on the kitchen attic. The eight sides of *paccoda* represented one God; four elements of life: earth, water, air, and fire; and three colors: yellow, red, and green. Red and yellow were pre-Islamic or *adat* or Bugis kingdoms. Red was the color of Bone King, Arung Palakka, who was known for his bravery; and yellow was that of Kingdom of Luwuk, the oldest kingdom in South Sulawesi; and green was that of the Islamic kingdom of Gowa, the color of Islamic piety.

Nika showed us a *bissu* ritual instrument, *baku panampa*. It was a round basket made from palm leaves and on its sides hanged various palm leaf folded to shape like human beings, animals, and geometric shapes. What captured my interests were the three types of shapes of human beings. They represented three kinds of human beings: *tau-tau* (figurine), *rupa tau* (human-face creature), and *tau tongeng* (human being). In this world, smiling, Mak Rusda and Nika told us that in this world, there were a lot of *tau-tau* and *rupa tau*, only few *tau tongeng*. They critiqued the materialistic and permissible character of Indonesian society. The basic color of *baku panampa* was white, which represented the life as a pure. The other colors were red and pink. They used the silk dyeing technique to color the palm leaves. Suddenly Nika stood up, placed the *baku panampa* on their head, and whirled. As they whirled faster, the *baku panampa* with its tassels formed a circle. Nika stopped and explained that *baku panampa* was the earth itself surrounded by human beings, animals, and planets.

"You have to be graceful in your movements, or you will look savage and ugly. We are not human beings when we are savage, wild," Nika said.

Nika then picked up *lalosu* and *arumpigi*. They walked gracefully in circle, shaking the *lalosu* and *arumpigi*. The dance was performed to call spirits, and the clatter the *lalosu* and *arumpigi* created indicated that there was a life inside, the life of spirits. Yet during my research field (2012 – 2014) I had not witnessed the performance of *lalosu-arumpigi* dance, except one during the festival of *Cap Gomeh*, Chinese New Year in 2014, but the dance were performed not by *bissu* but by high-school girls. I saw the girls rehearsing guided by Nika in front of their salon.



Fig. 5. The high school girls are rehearsing before their performance of *lalosu-arumpigi* dance in the festival of *Cap Gomeh*. Photo by the author.

Rusda had been waiting for the local people to come and bring their alms. We were waiting for the precession of mangolo, but we could not wait until the sunset, since we had to stop by Tia's house to find out the preparation of *songka bala* and *mabissu* which would be performed the following day. I did not see Mak Rusda in Tia's ritual of *songka bala*, since she also performed the same ritual in her house.

After several weeks, I received a call from a self proclaimed European documentary film maker, asking for my help to communicate with Mak Rusda, since Mak Rusda spoke only in Bugis, and she her self did not speak Indonesian, and her helper, a Javanese man, spoke Indonesian and Javanese. From my conversation with Mak Rusda I found out that the film maker was required to perform a ritual of soul-mate seeking. Mak Rusda listed all requirements, which I told to the film maker. Later, the film maker told me that the ritual was performed without any obstacle, and she felt relieved and happy. I wondered why; it was because she received blessing from Mak Rusda, or because she managed to record the ritual performance.



Fig. 6. Mak Rusda, the third from left, wearing a black shirt and purple flower sarong is performing a ritual in a Chinese temple during the Chinese New Year Festival (*Cap Gomeh*).  
Photo by the author.



## 5. Nika and Daeng Patta

I did not plan to do my research in that day. I just took a short walk around Segeri market, but Desi, saw me and asked me stop by.

"You can't just pass my house!" Nika said with smile.

I did not want to be impolite, I stopped by. We had a conversation while Nika was serving two customers, a man and woman. Their fingers were very skillful in cutting hair, and apparently Nika did not have any problem to cut and talk at the same time.

"It is a slow day, I would close earlier today. If you have time, we can visit a Segeri imam, living nearby. His name is Haji Yusuf." Nika said. I agreed. Nika asked permission to change their cloth. They wore, as usual, red *daster* with black flower motif. Nika returned and dressed in black and white blouse and black knee-length pants, as usual. We arrived at the imam's house, across the street, but the imam was not in the house. Rather than returning home, Nika suggested me to meet Daeng Patta. At the first time, Nika appeared hesitant. Nika told me that they and Patta had many disagreements, but they advised me to visit him and ask about *bissu*.

"He knows the *bissu* and their regalia very well," Nika convinced me.

His house was located in the fish-farming area in Segeri. Nika told me in the past when people said Segeri, they mean not the Segeri market neighborhood, but the area where Patta lived. That was the area where the *bissu* performed *mappalili*.

"I will stay in car, only *Marus* will meet him," Nika told me as we approached Patta's house. Nika warned me not to mention that they stayed in the car, and asked me to tell him that they were no longer active as a *bissu*. The road was very narrow, it was enough only for one car and a *bentor* (motorized pedicab). To pass one another, another car had to find a crossroad. We arrived at an old wooden stilt house with bamboo fence. *Marus* and I went in. Patta with smile welcomed us in the living room, looked like a veranda, on the ground floor. The room was also used as a class room where Patta taught the children in the neighborhood to read the Qur'an.

*Marus* did not sit and asked about the several *bissu* regalia had been missing after Bidin's death in 2011. Patta said that he did not keep them, and suggested he should ask Puang Matoa and Nika. *Marus* said Nika did not know, that was why he came to ask him. What he knew, Patta said, several regalia were kept in *Puang Matoa's* house in Pangkajene. After hearing Patta's answer, *Marus* introduced me and left. I walked him outside and waved my hand as he entered the car and drove off. I returned to the veranda.

"Did you meet Azis [Nika's nickname]?" Patta asked.

"Yes," I responded with a short answer.

Daeng Patta paused and explained the problems the *bissu* faced, including the young *calabai* who became *bissu* just for an economic reason. Even artists, Patta complained, exploited *bissu*; they paid the *bissu* less than what they deserved. He then explained that *bissu* was not all about transgender identity but ascetic practice.

"People came to *bissu* not for entertainment but for something matters in their life," he said.

"Somebody might be born as *calabai*, but not as a *bissu*. You need spiritual trainings to become a *bissu*," he added.

Patta told me that from all of the young *bissu*, only Rimah performed *irebba*. Rimah's *irebba* was the most expensive initiation ritual that Patta witnessed; it cost 40 millions rupiahs. Led by Puang Matoa Bidin, it was performed in a stilt house in Taraweang, a village in

Labakkang, for three days. A week before the *irebba*, any animal and human being was not allowed to pass through the ground under the house.

"Azis is not a *bissu*," he said. I did not ask further questions and remain silent, showing my respect to Nika. I did want to hear something negative about Nika. Patta's explanation was obvious to me. Patta's understanding of the *bissu* excluded those young *bissu* who were considered no longer constrained within the *bissu* ascetic traditions. But, Patta was not alone. I had a conversation with a local scholar who wrote a book and several articles about *bissu* on his blog. He told me that Nika was not a *bissu*, even though the cover of his book showed Nika performed *ma'giri*.

The contradiction the local people had about who were and were not *bissu* was intriguing. The contradictions were a consequence of the conflicts between the *bissu*, the *adat* council, and the local government and artists, which occurred from the outset of the restoration of the *bissu* in 1998. The conflicts were polarized into two contradictory positions: those who were concerned with the authenticity and continuity of the *bissu* traditions, and those with the survival of the *bissu* as an individual and a community. For the former, prioritizing tradition over community, claimed that the *bissu* would not survive, if they did not preserve their 'authentic' traditions; and for the latter, with their concerned with the community and less engagement with the issues related to authentic tradition project, claimed that it was the *bissu* who need to survive, and when they survive, the tradition would survive. The proponents of the community-based view embraced a liberal view that tradition as dynamic practice and more pluralistic in their projection of 'traditional' identity, while those of the tradition-based view embraces the conservative view that tradition is unchanged but remain relevant to contemporary social problems and monolithic in their projection of 'traditional' identity. Yet, I found the dichotomy was clear only on paper but not in social interaction. Patta did not reject the incorporation of the *bissu* into modern performance; and the young *bissu* I met once told me that in their new places, they hid their identity as *bissu* because they wanted to live freely as ordinary transgender individuals. It meant that they acquiesced to the view that *bissu* had to live in an ascetic, traditional life.

Patta told me, like other people in Segeri did, that I came when the *bissu*'s activities declined. As the head of Segeri *adat* council, he travelled with *bissu* in several provinces. The last event that he joined was the *bissu*'s performance in Jakarta. The delegation from Pangkep consisted of six *bissu* and eleven committee members – Nika and Ciang were not the names he mentioned.

I asked Patta about *rakkala*, the sacred plough, preserved in the regalia house. He told me the story of the *rakkala*, even though he still did not trust the accuracy of the story and kept telling me to read the genealogy of Segeri kings written by Maddusila, a Segeri historian. He told me that the *rakkala* and an outcaste prince of Bone, La Tenri Sessu, were drifted to the Segeri shore. Sessu was alleged to have incest with his twin sister. I read Maddusila A. M.'s *Genealogy of the Family of We Tenrileleang Sultanah Aisyah Matinroe ri Soreang (The Queen of Luwu 23rd and Tanete 25<sup>th</sup>): Notes from History*, which at the first time he was hesitant to allow me to photocopy, but finally allowed me with a warning that I could not circulate the book widely. "Just read the genealogy, all of the answers are there, there is no need to meet me," he tried to convince me. The story in the book was different from Patta's. I realized why he doubted his own story. La Tenri Sessu's complete name was Abdul Wahab La Tenri Sessu. From his Islamic name: Abdul (servant), Wahab (one of the names of God in the Qur'an which means the all-giver), we can tell that Sessu had to be born after the period of Islamization of

Luwu. He had titles as *opu cenning*, a title given to a prince of Luwu (one of the biggest Bugis Kingdoms), and Karaeng Segeri (the king of Segeri). He was the oldest son of the king of Tanete (a kingdom was located in Barru, the neighbor regency of Pangkep) who married the queen of Tanete, We Tenri Leleang Sultanah Aisyah. In 1767, his mother asked him to move to Segeri because of a family conflict. What kind of conflict it was and how it occurred were not told in the genealogy. In 1776, Sessu was appointed as the king of Segeri. He waged war against Bone during his reign until 1799. He was defeated and Segeri became Bone's *palili* (colony) since then until 1814, when Britain defeated Bone. But, Bone regained Segeri with the help from Tanete, La Tenri Sessu's father's kingdom, in 1815. In 1824, Dutch came and colonized Segeri and its neighborhood.

The other version of the story I heard from a local historian. La Tenri Sessu was sailing to Segeri when big waves hit his ship. Suddenly, on the deck of his ship, he found a wood log shaped like a plough. His guards threw the log, but when the waves came again, the log returned to the deck. It occurred several times, and La Tenri Sessu gave up and let the log lie on the deck. Strangely, he remembered his dream where he would receive the regalia. He brought the regalia to Segeri. The Segeri people welcomed their king and the regalia.

Yet, those stories were not the popular story that the Segeri people knew. The popular one, and this story was cited by many scholars of *bissu*, told a different story. The *rakkala* belonged to Bone kingdom. It was missing during a big flood. Forty *bissu* were sent to search for the sacred plough. The *bissu* finally found it in Segeri, but the king of Segeri rejected to return it. The forty *bissu* stayed in Segeri. The reason they stay remained controversial. In one story, the forty *bissu* stayed because they failed to persuade the King of Segeri, and decided to stay in Segeri to take care of the sacred plough; they had no reason to return to Bone. In the other story, they stayed in Segeri to avoid execution if they returned without the *rakkala*. In the most cited story among scholars, they stayed in Segeri because they were sent by the King of Bone to take care of the regalia.<sup>233</sup> When the King of Bone heard the information that the missing *rakkala* was found in Segeri, he sent his delegation to Segeri to verify the information. It turned out that the information was true, and the King of Bone demanded that the King of Segeri return the *rakkala*, which was rejected. After a long negotiation, they reached an agreement that the *rakkala* was destined to stay in Segeri. The king of Bone sent forty *bissu* to take care of the regalia. Yet, amid the contradiction, the people did not dispute the origin and number of the *bissu*. The *bissu* in Segeri was also called *bissu Pattapuloe* (the Forty *bissu*). Some people told me that the number of the *bissu* who performed *mappalili* used to be forty.

I was very excited when Patta asked me to see the *rakkala*. He asked permission to get prepared. Patta showed up in front of the door, dressed in a brown batik with a Muslim cap on his head. He took his Honda scooter and we left. The small scooter ran slowly. We stopped at some sacred places along the road. We stopped at a big tree, *aju ara* (ara tree like banyan tree was considered sacred) where in the past the kings of Segeri were inaugurated. I saw an empty and corroded *walasuji* probably lied there for several months. Patta also pointed a tree in the middle of the fish ponds where *mappalili* was annually held. We continued our trip. We stopped by a house and picked up a key of the regalia house, and continued to the regalia house.

We arrived at the regalia house. I saw some laundries were hanged on the rope tied between the wooden pillars. On the ground floor, there were also laundries hanged on the bamboo poles attached to the pillars of the house. A half of the ground floor, covered with

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<sup>233</sup> A. S. Kambie, *Akar Kenabian Sawerigading [The Prophethood of Sawerigading in Islamic Scriptural Traditions]* (Makassar, Indonesia: Parasufia, 2003), 96–97.

bamboo fence, it was used as a storeroom. There was also a bamboo bench next to it. The floor was very dusty. Patta apparently cited something before opening the door. His face looked intense, but he managed to control it and smiled. As we enter the room, I smelt wet dusty, unpleasant but bearable. Patta open the yellow batik curtain and asked me to follow him. Behind the curtain was the regalia room. He opened the red cloth and showed me the *rakkala* hanged with blue nylon ropes. These were the first time I saw the *rakkala* closely and alone. I realized that the *rakkala* was not one but two tied into one. The big one was placed on the top, wrapped with white cloth and tied with dry palm leaves. Under it, the small one, wrapped in the same way. Patta explained to me that the big one was the authentic one, it was used during *mappalili*, and the small one just stayed in the room, accompanied the big one. He appeared not comfortable to stay nearby the *rakkala*, and moved to the other regalia.

Below the sacred ploughs, laid ritual instruments: an earthen pot inside a rattan basket was used to burn incense, the other shaped like cylinder was a metal candle stand, and a white box for candle stand, and an tin pot inside a rattan basket. A piece of white cloth was spread in the middle, in front of it were a glass of water, a white ceramic plate covered with a ceramic bowl and a small black ceramic statue with a human body and an animal head. On the sides of the ceramic plate were two ceramic water containers shaped like gourds with narrow and long necks, and a two-liter coca-cola bottle filled with water. All of the ritual instruments were placed inside an altar fenced with bamboo planks with rattan fence on its edge covered with red cloth. Down the altar, was spread a piece of white cloth. On it arranged from the top were a kind of stick wrapped with yellow cloth and a piece of square-knitted palm leaves. Down in the middle, on the carpet, were four earthen pots, one of them without cover, placed on an earthen tray, was used to burn incense. On the right side a black plastic bag, a bottle of oil, and a plastic bucket with a flat stone on the top of it. On the right side, about one step, I saw three sacks of rice, the white sacks turned to black because of mold. At the right corner, I saw two bamboo baskets where a national flag, a palm carpet, a bamboo log, and ritual instruments such as *lalosu* or *alosu* and *arumpigi, oiye* (bamboo planked wrapped with palm leaves), *lae-lae/ lea-lea* (fringed bamboo idiophones) were dumped.

Patta took two drums hanged on the walls and showed them to me. The drums covered with white cloth were used for *bissu* rituals. Patta returned the drums and showed me more than ten palm trays hanged next to the drums. Next to the door, I saw a yellow wooden box with a sticker that read "art instruments donated by the office of culture and tourism, South Sulawesi." Above it, on the wall, I saw the picture of Haji Sake, the leader of *bissu* in black and silver costume, wearing glasses. It was a relief to exit the room and breathed fresh air. "This regalia house is abandoned now," Patta said as we stepped down the stairs. I got off at Segeri Market and Patta drove off. Patta was very sincere in taking care of the *bissu* regalia. He once told me that every year the *rakkala* had to be brought to the village, or disaster would occur.

## 6. Nika and Haji Yusuf

The following day I stopped by Nika's salon. Nika and the woman they called Desi, sitting in the living room, folding clothing.

"I have a family gathering today. I could drop you at Imam Yusuf's house," said Nika. I agreed. But, before leaving the house I asked Nika's permission to go to the restroom but found no water in the water tub. Nika told me that they had to buy water and he missed the water seller that day. I told them it was fine, I could just stop by the mosque. We arrived at a wooden stilt

house, but it looked like two-story house, since on the ground, it had a living room. Since all of them living upstairs, we knocked the upstairs door. The door was not opened, but we heard a woman's voice inside asked Nika to go down to the living room downstairs. We went down, a man in his 60s, wearing robe and white hajj cap, greeted us. He chatted with Nika and asked us to come in.

Nika introduced me to Yusuf and asked permission to leave. We saw Nika entering his Hilux, his *to boto* waved to us, turned the machine on, honked and left. Yusuf's wife came out, brought two cups of hot tea. She greeted me, asked about Nika, and disappeared behind the curtain. Yusuf told me that he was a Segeri native. He has been there since he was born. He traveled only twice. When he was a kid, his parents asked them not to stare at *bissu*, they brought curse. But, it made him more curious. He with his friends used sneaked out and lied to their parents just to watch the *bissu*'s performances. One day he watched a *puang matoa* (*bissu* leader) ran amuck in the Segeri market. They were enraged because the people were selling earthenware during *mappalili*. Frightened, the people ran away, the *puang matoa* broke the earthen pots they found. "People are scared of *bissu*," he closed his story.

"I know Nika since they were kid. They are a good person. They work hard. Nika is very generous, they always help orphans and poor kids who cannot afford to pay for their schools," he said. Schools Yusuf meant was elementary school. He told me that many of the poor kids did not finish their elementary schools because their parents could not afford to pay the school fees that increased every year.

"The *bissu* have been here for a long time. When people tell me we have to get rid of the *bissu*, I am skeptical. They are part of Segeri cultural life. We could not just ignore them. We need to engage with them, educate them, and do not force them to embrace Islam as we practice. If you bend a twig, you'll break it," He said.

Yusuf told me that the Segeri people knew that oppressions did not make the *bissu* vanish. "They were oppressed by *gerombolan* (Kahar Muzakkar's separatist movement and its allies) and *GP Ansor* (Ansor Youth Movement, the youth wing of *Nahdlatul Ulama*), but they still exist." And, he explained, it was the local Islamic tradition that contributed to the popularity of effeminate men. Since Islam did not allow women to perform in public, women were performed by men.

"When I was kid, we watched *maserri*, a dance performed by men. They are perfect male-to-female impostors, if you are new in this area, you can't tell if they are men. They are very entertaining." the imam said. "And, funny!" I saw his face with his big smile as if he was a kid yesterday.

"You see the flat concrete where people dry their rice grains, it was used to be the place where we watched *maserri*," he said while pointing to an empty flat concrete across the street. *Maserri* is, Yusuf explained, a Middle Eastern dance that the Segeri people adopted. The music accompanied the dance is *rebana* (this word is derived from the Arabic word: *Rabbana*, Our Lord), a tambourine popular among Malay Muslims. Yusuf paused as we heard the Quranic recitation from *Al-Multazam* Mosque, the largest mosque in Segeri. It was Friday, I knew it was a sign to stop my conversation. I asked for permission and returned to Nika's house. I took a *bentor*. But, as I crossed the main street, I saw a huge crowd at *Multazam*, I decided to perform Friday prayer in the mosque. The traffic on the narrow main road was bad. It became worse as the drivers tried to avoid big holes in the middle and sides of the inter-province road. A driver smiled and said, "fly!" The honking driver tipped his head out of the window, and said with his innocent smile, "yes, don't you listen? I keep trying!" The local government tried to improve the

quality of the road, but the local residents complained since the road was never completed. Puddle and dust were like season cycle for the local residents. In front of *Multazam*, half of the road had several big holes and puddles, and the other half unfinished construction of concrete road, creating uneven surface. Trucks and buses from the other regencies and provinces did not have an alternative road, which making the traffic worse during rush hours. I heard that at night, without street lights, many accidents occurred in the area. It was an irony for a cement mining industry area.

The mosque was also under renovation. I heard that the renovation stopped for several months, until it received a donation of billions rupiah from a Segeri man who worked in Papua. Most mosques in Indonesia were built from local community supports. The Segeri people hoped that the mosque could accommodate the Segeri Muslims during Id prayers. Half of the mosque was full, and I saw Haji Yusuf on the first line, giving instruction to the people to fill in the line in front of them. I saw that the second floor was still under construction. After the Friday prayer, I walked about ten minutes to Nika's house. Nika was cutting hair of a man in their salon.

"What did the imam tell you?" Nika asked curiously. I told Nika what I heard from Yusuf. Nika looked very happy. I asked permission to leave, as usual Nika told me to come any time, even not for research. I walked to the main road, took *pete-pete* (a mini-bus with nine passengers) to return home.

## **7. Mangolo Salo (River Ritual) in Pangkajene**

Nika called me around 8 pm on Thursday night, January 10, 2013. It was dark because of power outage in the whole area of Pangkep regency. Nika called me, informing me that they were performing a ritual in Pangkajene, at the house of a Pangkep parliament member. Nika asked me to come. That night was a week after the big flood in several regencies in South Sulawesi. And, at 9 pm the village had slept. But anyway, I told Nika I would come. After I called anyone I could reach, finally I found someone who could drive me there. Sakka, the motorized pedicab driver who rode my son to kindergarten, was available to drive me. Guided by the pedicab's dim lights, we drove into the muddy road, sometimes Sakka had to maneuver to avoid puddles. Yet the road located along the bank of Kali Bersih, the biggest river in Pangkep which was always crowded by boats from the surrounding islands around the regency during daylight, was never silent. The whispering stream, croaking frogs, moving leaves, and the light rain at that night were enough to accompany us in the tranquil narrow road. Sakka apologized that he would remain silent along the road, since he needed to focus on the road. When we arrived at the main road, the situation was quite different. The city was still busy. The trucks passed, illuminating the smooth asphalt road.

"Thanks God, we finally reach this road!" Sakka broke the silence. Sakka and I finally talked. We saw the lights on in the houses we passed on the street. We arrived at the house, a two-storied house located in the elite residence in Pangkajene. Nika welcomed us. As usual Nika dressed in red-black blouse and black knee-length pants. We were seated on the teak-carving sofa. Around twenty of us attended the ritual did not find difficulty to find seats in the spacious living room. The wall, right in front of me, was adorned with Arabic calligraphy beautifully carved from the shells of pearl oysters, and a family picture covering a half of the wall. I had just realized that I was in an awkward situation, and tried to break the silence. As usual I expected Nika to introduce me to the people. But, at this time, Nika was mostly silent.

Not until the middle-aged woman teased Nika. Smiling, Nika then introduced me to the woman. The woman told me that they performed the ritual to ward off misfortune.

"We don't want to believe, but it's happened. It's real!" She said. The other women joined our conversation. One of them told me that her daughter studied at Alauddin State Islamic University in Makassar. She told me that she had been dying, until the *sandro* (traditional healer) helped her.

"If you don't believe the spiritual healing (*massandro*), I do!" she said to me, but I knew you she meant was not me but the absent unbelievers. I looked at Nika, appealing their response, but they were just smiling, showing their agreement. A cell phone rang, and the woman picked up the call. Nika whisperingly told me that the owner of this house was a *sandro*, "a well-known *sandro*," Nika told me.

"She is not a *bissu*, but her spiritual knowledge is deeper than the *bissu*. And, her husband is a parliament member, a venerable and pious man," Nika added.

"Hey, there is a new member here!" The owner of the house came to greet me. She wore all in white, veil and dress, except her sarong, brown with colorful thin stripes. I stood up and shook her hand, "probably Nika already told you about me?" "Yes, I know even if Nika did not tell me," she laughed. Sandro Odah told me that she sometimes felt lonely staying alone in the big house. One of her children studied in Java, and the others got married and lived with their own families.

Taking a deep breath, she then told me about her humiliation and anger when she saw the current condition of the *bissu*. They practiced *bissu* for social and economic status, they ignored their spiritual root; today *bissu* is only for staged performance. After talking about some *bissu* she knew and their sufferings because of their deviant behaviors, she finally closed the conversation and said, "don't ask me if the *bissu* are now declining."

Odah then invited us to a small room located at the left corner of the living room. Unlike the regalia room of the *bissu*, I did not see any altar inside, except a wooden cupboard next to the door. This room was packed with the crowd, and I stayed outside, near the door, to keep the *sandro* visible for my record. Nika warned me not to record the ritual. Before I responded to Nika, I heard heavy voice from behind me saying, "don't record the event!" I looked at the source of the voice, it was a man dressed in a shirt and sarong completed with a Muslim cap. He looked serious. Nodding to him, I walked around six steps, put my bag under the table, and returned to my seat. About three hours, the ritual was finally finished. The intense situation became relax and the *sandro* began to greet us as if she returned from a long journey. She woke up from her trance. Her feral face was now welcoming. Looking at me, smiling at her, she suddenly said, "you will be a great man, believe me!"

After thirty minutes passed, we prepared to go to Kali Bersih, the main river in Pangkajene, to perform the ritual of *mangolo salo* (facing the river). We were packed into four cars. In the car, Nika explained the role of the *bissu* in relation to the ritual, which I understand why Nika attended the ritual at the Sandro's home. One of the roles of the *bissu* was to ward off natural disaster, and the ritual of *mangolo salo* is to ward off flood. In the past, the *bissu* used to perform the ritual but now because of the lack of support from the local government, it was rarely performed.

"Now, see what happened, we have this big flood last week. People died, rice failed," Nika said. We arrived at the bank of the Kali Bersih River.

"Where is your camera?" Nika asked me. "This time you may record the ritual," Nika said, not waiting for my response. I took out my camera and sound recorder. Above us, the

trucks roared. Our presence gained attention from the teenagers playing in Bambu Runcing, the city park across the street. They approached and aggregated into a group of curious passerby. We walked down the stairs, and reached the bottom of where the ritual was performed. As we stood on the curbside, I had just realized that I was the only one among the crowd who did not wear sarong. I saw Nika wearing a traditional male cap of Bone (one of regency in South Sulawesi). Sandro Odah began whispering her chants, heard only people around her. She unsheathed her kris and pointed to the sky. No stars were visible. I heard giggles among the teenage bystanders. The *sandro* dropped carefully a bamboo-knitted plate of feast containing an egg, betel leaves and areca nut, and push it gently with her kris tip. The plate floated for a while before it sank. Odah retreated and gathered with the crowd behind her. Nika took her position and preceded the ritual. The *walasuji*, a bamboo-knitted trunk of feast containing banana, coconut, and the other kinds of local sweet fruit, was carefully dropped down on the water. Nika silently chanted and took the kris from Sandro Odah's hand, and pushed the trunk gently with the kris. The trunk floated and sank in the middle of the river.

"Our feast has been accepted," Nika told us.

"Yes, it was accepted," Sandro Odah replied.

That was the end of the ritual. We returned to our cars.

"You come here!" Sandro Odah said, pointing her finger to a teenage boy. He resisted but finally approached her.

"Here is the water. Wash your face and hand. It is water of fortune and blessing, believe me!" Sandro Odah convinced him.

The boy took the water, as we walking to our car, I saw our curious bystanders wash their hands and faces. They waved at us as our car moved. We returned to Odah's house almost midnight. It was almost 10:30 pm and I told Nika and Sandro Odah that it was time for me to go home. Odah insisted me that I had to return to her home since the dinner was ready.

"Eating means receiving blessing!" Odah said. I could not find a better reason, and joined them for dinner. After the dinner, I called Sakka to pick me up. I returned home, finding my wife and sons sleeping.

## 8. *Indo Botting* in Segeri

On January 24, 2013, I met Nika one day at the house of Syafruddin, the former head of Segeri. Syafruddin asked Nika to be the *indo botting* for his son's wedding. I introduced my self and my research on *bissu*, and immediately Syafruddin and the other men enthusiastically explained to me their views on *bissu* and *calabai*.

Syafruddin said that *bissu* existed only in Segeri. They performed *ma'giri*, *mappalili*, and dances. The *bissu* that sprang in the other regions was only a response to the *bissu* euphoria in 2000s. I did not ask him a direct question on the forty *bissu* from Bone, instead I asked his opinion about the sacred plough that were kept in the regalia house. He responded that he did want to speculate too far in the past, but to see reality that the people of Segeri had in the present. Jamaluddin's tone sounded skeptical about the validity and authenticity of the story.

He did not agree on the view that *bissu* were priests, and their practices were religious ones. He predicted that the *bissu* would survive as long as they were in the realm of culture as a way to avoid potential conflicting ideas on Islam and local traditions and to provide alternative incomes to *bissu* and *calabai*. He suggested that *bissu* and *adat* (custom) should be managed by the government as a part of local tourist attraction in Segeri and Pangkep. The previous



government, he said, succeeded in building the *bissu* and *calabai* community, but they did not continue to the current government. The current government lacked interest in culture. Syafruddin blamed the local government for the decline and disintegration of the *bissu*.

He explained that *adat*, culture, and economy were a holistic and integral in the local vernacular terms. But, for *adat* and religion, Jamaluddin quickly added, a clear boundary had to be established, not because they were different, but because it is a strategic way to manage potential conflicts. Jamaluddin viewed that when people maintained autonomy of culture, they not only avoided conflicts but also they managed to integrate culture into the economic development without any problem. Nika agreed and told us that when they received invitation to perform, coordination was the most difficult thing to do. They had to call the *bissu* through their cell phones, asked about their availability, gathered them in one place and provided transportation. It was different during Bidin's leadership, the time when the government was very supportive, the coordination was easy. People just called Bidin or came to the regalia house. "Now, if you come to the regalia house, you will find only an empty house," Nika said.

Syafruddin asked us to get in the house. In the house, the topic of our conversation was more casual. We spoke in Bugis. A man, in his late 50s, surprisingly told me his experience of having relationships with several *calabai* in Segeri. Looking at the man, Nika explained that at that time in Segeri only *calabai* were allowed to stay outside until late night, therefore they were often sexually harassed. The conversation then went to a topic on how *calabai* were treated different from women and men.

"If a *calabai* teenage goes out and do not return for hours, I am not concerned. But, a teenage girl?" a middle-aged woman asked, every body laughed.

"It is *siri'* [shame]," the other woman said, still laughing.

"You have to protect the seal, do not accept when the seal is broken," a man said.

"You mean Aqua bottle [water bottle]?" a woman asked, laughing and slapping lightly on the shoulder of a woman next to her. Everybody laughed.

"You think women are not smart, we get it!" another woman said, holding her stomach to control her laugh.

From the conversation, I understand that female virginity was still considered central to the gender norm among the people in Segeri. Yet, the women rejected the notion that the "broken seal" was applied only to women. Men also had to prevent themselves from having premarital sexual relationship.

"Hey, your rice's burned!" a female voice heard from the kitchen. The women laughed and went back to their kitchen.

There were two types of *calabai*, Nika said, *calabai* and *calabai kedo-kedonami* (those who behave like *calabai*). A man came and asked Nika to check the wedding altar. We went upstairs. I saw an almost finished wedding altar with red, green and purple flowers, glazing beads carefully arranged on a golden nylon cloth, complemented with iridescent-crystal beaded curtain. Nika told me that golden color was royal color and purple was the color that was currently in fashion. Arranging beads, Nika told me that if they were still *bissu*, they were not allowed to work as a beautician and wedding planner (*indo botting*). *bissu* have their distinct position in traditional communities.

Nika told me that he had become a *bissu* for 15 years. "Everybody in this village knows me," Nika said. Nika explained from the beginning how they became a *bissu*. It was an instinct, Nika said, an instinct that they could not explain.

"You cannot become a *bissu* if you do not have transgender instinct," they said.

"I feel like somebody whispering in my ears, suddenly I feel the [*bissu*] knowledge infiltrates my body. I cannot reject it, I try, until now I keep rejecting it. I do not know what will happen if I accept it," Nika said, looking confused.

"If I could lend this feeling to other people, they will know the great feeling I have as a *bissu*," Nika said.

"But, on the other side, I have the other things I need to take care of," Nika Said, clarifying their status as a *bissu*.

Nika struggled, like the other young *bissu* I met, to find their space. Nika's position was problematic since they tried to claim the social status of *bissu* that was not suitable to their everyday outlook and profession, yet they resisted the transgender identity *calabai* and urban *waria* (male transvestite) occupied. Besides this problematic position, Nika shared the concern among the local people and *bissu*, since they witnessed the declining of *bissu* members because many old *bissu* passed away and *calabai* did not have interest to become *bissu*. The *bissu* currently struggled between maintaining the *bissu*'s distinct social status and recruiting new members among *calabai*. For *calabai* to occupy the noble *bissu* position, Nika said, was not a simple process. Before Nika was initiated, they had to do apprenticeship with Puang Matoa Bidin. It took several years before Nika was initiated as a *bissu*. After the initiation, the young *bissu* were called *bissu mamata* (novice *bissu*), or *sandro lolo* (novice healer), depending on their spiritual skills. The only difference between *sandro lolo* and *bissu mamata* was that *bissu mamata* did not perform spiritual healing; they performed *lalosu-arumpigi* dance and *ma'giri*.

"You may search, I am the only one young *bissu* in Segeri!" Nika said.

## 9. Healing Ritual in Soppeng

January 29, 2013, Nika called me to accompany them to meet their clients in Soppeng. I came early in the morning in the following day, and they told me that the meeting was postponed in the afternoon. The distance between Pangkep and Soppeng was 64 miles, but with the bad condition of the road, it took three hours to reach our destination. Nika told me we would leave at noon. I stayed in Nika's house. Nika and I sat in their salon, drinking tea. "If I do not have them, I cannot run this business," Nika said, pointing to the three men sitting outside, smoking. They were preparing ropes and sharpen *parangs* (Indonesian swords) and a saw and putting small tables and tools in the truck's deck.

"They are *to boto*," Nika said. *To boto* was a sensitive term. I tried to avoid asking about it, even though the term seemed significant in determining a *calabai*'s status as a *bissu*. From my conversations with some local people and Japa, a transgender *bissu* in her 60, *to boto* was a term used by *calabai* to refer to their sexual spouse, 'husband'. *bissu* did not have *to boto*, they said. It became a public secret that some self-identified *bissu* had *to boto*. When the first time I met Nika, they felt uneasy to talk about something related to intimacy and sexuality. I never asked. The conversation began when Nika showed me the sticker of the film, *Wariazone*, on the window of their living room. Nika knew the film, even though they never watched the film, since Nika helped the film makers to gather their data in Makassar. I told them that It was not like what the people in Segeri, and in Indonesia, saw on televisions and films. The gay people – I used this term instead of LGBTQ people since it was familiar among local transgender people – in the US still suffered discriminations. Nika raised their brows.

"Why do they mobilize gay right movements?" I asked, trying to convince them. Nika looked confused, not because they did not understand what I said, but because it was hard for

them to believe that discrimination against transgender people still occurred in the liberal country such as the US. I told them that when we talked about gay people in the US, we did not talk about their sexual relationship but inequality, injustice, discrimination, and violence. Nika agreed. They told me that they did not respect those who came to them and asked about something related to their bed room.

"I respect my guests as long as they stay in my living room," he said. Therefore, I remained silent when Nika mentioned *to boto*, because I thought they raised an issue related to what Nika said as bedroom matter. But, I was wrong. Nika continued talking about *to boto*. They were very concerned about the common misunderstanding of the term.

"*To boto* is not husband," Nika said. "Or you may translate it into Indonesian as husband, but in Bugis sense of the word, the term is slightly different," Nika said. Nika then explained two kinds of husband in *lontarak*, one was related to the term *kawa*, which Nika translated it as barbed wire. *Kawa*, Nika explained, referred to the notion of husbandry as protection. *Calabai* needed *kawa*, they said, since they were the most vulnerable social group. Nika said they agreed with the people who translated *to boto* as husband as long as they understood that husband in that sense was to fulfill psychological need, not sexual need. The other meaning of *to boto*, Nika added, was helper; it meant that the relationship between *calabai* or *bissu* with their *to boto* was professional, not sexual.

We left at noon. We stopped at the salon of Ciang, a young *bissu* featured in Rhoda Grauer's documentary film, *The Last bissu*. Nika introduced me to Ciang.

"Domestic violence!" Nika said and laughed as they saw a bump on Ciang's forehead. Ciang face turned red and smiled, trying to cover their embarrassment. They told us they quarreled with a man, apparently Ciang's boy friend, and did not expect that he would behave in such a violent manner. I will tell you Ciang's story in the other section of this chapter. We left Ciang and arrived in a plantation after three hours drive. *Marus* and the other man went in the plantation and disappeared in the forest of bamboo and cocoa, leaving us at the edge of the asphalt road. They returned and carry the bamboo logs on their shoulders. They went back and forth, bringing the bamboo logs and coconuts.

When we arrived in Soppeng, we did not go to the client's house, but stopped at the house of a royal woman, Risma. Her husband was a former government official in Soppeng. Risma was not there, she was in Sengkang, a neighbor regency. She told Nika through cell phone that she would arrive about an hour. Firda, a *calabai* in their 20s, opened the gate and asked us to come in. A man in his late 50s greeted us. While waiting, we conversed with Firda. Nika and Firda talked about fashion and wedding decoration. Their conversation was interrupted by a Toyota Avanza parked right in front of the house. A woman in her late 50s showed up. Risma smiled and greeted everybody. She took a seat next to Nika and asked about their plan to meet the Muhammadiyah family. The family, Risma told us, was very conservative Muhammadiyah. They did not believe superstitions, until their son suffered a mysterious disease, and the mother was haunted by her ancestor's spirit who came into her dream every night, horrifying and saddening her. After Nika completed their story, Risma looked at me smiling at him. Nika suddenly realized that they had not introduced me. Before I said anything, Nika introduced me. The topic changed. We talked about *calabai* and *bissu*. Risma and Nika talked about commercialization and exploitation of *bissu*. They did not agree if *bissu* just perform as entertainers, because they lowered the status of *bissu* as spiritual teachers. Risma told us that even having a *calabai* child among people in Soppeng was a sign of royalty (*addattungang*).

Nika asked Risma to call the Muhammadiyah mother, Raisa. After hanging up, Risma asked to go to the house, which was about three or four houses from Risma's house. We met Raisa, a woman in her mid 60s, and some of her family members. Risma told Raisa about their plan and asked Nika to explain what happened to them. Nika seemed nervous and asked for forgiveness for telling the story. Nika said that the family's ancestor came to them, in their house in Segeri. Nika had to tell the story since Nika felt that that was their intention the spirit came to them, to remind his family. Nika told the family that they treated her ancestor as their guest and gave him what he needed. The ancestor told Nika, as Nika said, that she was ignored, and therefore he was angry and cursed his family, made them sick, poor, and humiliated. Raisa looked intense and sad as she was listening to Nika's story. She agreed with Nika. She cried as she told us that she had suffered for a long time. Nika gained more confidence. This was obvious in the way Nika addressed Raisa; at the beginning they addressed her with *puang* (a title for royal family), but in response to Raisa's story, Nika addressed her with *ibu* (mam), a polite address for a woman but had no class distinction.

"Mam, if you suffered short breaths and sometimes you becomes unconscious, or you feel insecure, there will no way to recover from it, if this family still ignore their ancestors. This family needs to perform *mangolo*, meeting the spirit, and *mabissu* (performing *bissu* ritual)," Nika said. Nika told the family that they were only a mediator and their responsibility was to tell the story, and advised what the family should do to redeem their ignorance.

"Whether or not they want to believe my story and perform the ritual, it depended upon them," Nika told us when we walked to Risma's house. The expense of the ritual, Nika said, would be around fifteen to twenty million rupiahs. Raisa told Nika that she needed to talk with their family, especially about the expense to perform the *bissu* ritual. Risma offered her help to find support from the local government. We returned to Risma's house.

Later, in the afternoon, Raisa and her son, Amin, came and joined us in the porch, drinking tea. Nika repeated to Raisa that the family would not be redeemed, if they did not perform the rituals. Raisa cried, and Amin remained silent, feeling helpless. Nika told Amin that he was the one suffered more because when he was young, he used to "play". In the local vernacular, "play" was an euphemistic term for immoral behaviors, especially engaging in pre-marital sexual intercourses. Amin looked confused but nodded in agreement. They came to tell Nika that they were undecided to perform *mabissu* but they were ready to perform *mangolo* in the afternoon. Nika told them to prepare their offerings for *mangolo arajang* (giving offerings to the regalia). After everything was ready, we went to *bola maridie* (yellow house, relic house). Nika led the ritual and also performed *massandro* (healing). Nika used an egg and *kemenyan* (burning incense placed inside an earthen bowl). Nika took the *kemenyan*, chanted and waved it around Raisa's head and Amin. It was unusual to see the young *bissu* performed *massandro* for a conservative old Muslim woman. After the ritual, the mother and son told Nika that they felt relieved. After the completion of the ritual, we returned to Risma's house, and Raisa and his son to their house.



Fig. 7. Nika is performing a healing ritual in the attic of the regalia house in Soppeng.

Later in the afternoon, Raisa called Risma, telling her that they decided to perform *mappadendang*. Risma and Nika were very upset, but nothing they could do to convince Raisa. Risma only told her that everything depended on her, they only advised her. After hanging up the phone, Risma told us that it was hard to convince a Muhammadiyah woman like Raisa, since she viewed that *mabissu* was heretic. On the other side, they were not conservative enough in holding their Muhammadiyah orthodox practices, since they agreed to perform *mappadendang*. From our conversation, I understood from the conversation that *mappadendang* was different from *mabissu* since *mappadendang* needed no *bissu*, it cost less, and it was a common practice among Muslims in Soppeng. *Mappadendang* for most local people in Soppeng was a festival performed after rice harvest to express thanks for the God's blessing. Central to the agricultural rite of *mappadendang* was performance of pounding a long wooden mortar with bamboo and wooden pestles, creating an energetic music. In the past, it was *sandro* (spiritual healer) initiated the ritual, since the sacral sound of the mortal was seen as a medium to communicate with deities and spirits. In the popular practice among the Bugis people, including Soppeng, *mappadendang* was a festival to celebrate the success of the harvest. There were many traditional performances such as traditional dances, swinging (*mattojang*), and Bugis martial art (*mappencak*). Raisa's family agreed to perform *mappadendang* not because it was a popular festivity in Soppeng, but because, as they implied during the conversation, its procession was less complicated, therefore it cost less. But, why did Raisa perform *mangolo arajang*? Only

Raisa might have an answer. What I had in mind was that it was Raisa's suffering that motivated her to perform the ritual. We left Raisa and her family in the city of Soppeng, and drove to a village of Soppeng to see a ritual led by an old *bissu*, Mak Ina.

## 10. Nika and *Bissu* Ina

We arrived at a wooden stilt house with a big crowd. It was a rice farming area, and Mak Ina's house with bamboo fences looked old and modest. In the front yard, under a blue tent, the women and *calabai* were cooking, while the others were sitting, chatting, and laughing. As we stepped up the stairs and entered the living room, we found a different situation. The silence in the room made me a little bit awkward. I followed Nika who took a seat right in front of the colorful offering carefully arranged around the big pillar in the middle of the room. We sat silently.

Firda told us that Mak Ina was performing a ritual. It was interesting how Firda and Nika addressed Ina. *Mak* was an intimate way to address an old woman. Like Mak Rusda, Mak Ina speaks softly and called anybody with *nak* (child). They used pronoun *idi* (a polite form of you) instead of *iko* (a common form of you, which is considered rude when it is used to address older people). Yet, Mak Ina looked different. They wore a white long sleeve shirt and the way they covered their hair with a white scarf looked like male Muslim clerics. They shaped it like a turban and placed it on the top of their head. The way they sat with open arms and cross legs was a sitting position associated with male. They had a prominent Adam's apple. Despite the way they addressed Ina with *mak* (mother), a title used to address a woman, the local people told me that Mak Ina was a transgender *bissu*. Ardin (a man in his 30's), Ina's adopted son, told us that Ina was one of the two old *bissu* in their 60's who was still alive in the village. In the past, he said, they were as *pajoge* or *penari angkong* (female transvestite dancers).

Mak Ina stared at Nika, who was apparently uncomfortable. Nika smiled and explained that we came to see the ritual. Nika said that we knew the information from Risma. Mak Ina did not recognize Nika. Nika told that they were a *bissu* from Segeri, and they knew Mak Ina since Mak Ina participated in many *bissu* events. Mak Ina did not remember Nika, until he mentioned that they were Bidin's disciple and used to perform with Bidin. "Oh, that is you! I do not recognize you," said Mak Ina, raising their voice for the first time. Nika told Ina about their lineage. They said that their grandmother, Daeng Warni, was a revered *calabai* in Segeri. Mak Ina asked Nika about Bidin, and Nika told Mak Ina that Bidin passed away in 2011.

"I stay home to take care of the regalia. I stop doing *indo botting*. I am too old, I cannot compete with young *calabai*," Mak Ina said. Mak Ina was poised and calm. Nika, when talked to Mak Ina, addressed themselves as *ana'ta* (your child), to show their respect to the old *bissu*.

In the mid of the living room, arranged around the pillar were offerings and *bissu* ritual instruments. I saw a smoke from burning incense from an earthen bowl, placed between two tin-boxes. on the left side, an old *parang*, *ana' baccing* (concussion plaques), an *alameng* with a wooden sheath tied with red cloth on the top and the bottom of it; a bunch of cassava trees tied and a stick wrapped with a red cloth tied together to the house pillar. On the right side, arranged were a tin tray with four cups of water, one filled in with water; a palm-leave basket with betel leaves and an areca nut placed on a glass plate, on the bottom of it, a bunch of green banana and a coconut, red and white plastic bags, and a hand-made black candle stuck into a banana; next to it another palm-leave basket with betel leaves and areca not placed on an old tin plate and a bunch of green banana; in front of the baskets were two tin trays with a bowl, and two cups of

water; a bowl of black glutinous rice; four Aqua and Coca-Cola bottles filled with water; rice wrapped in four rolls of banana leaves; and the very end of the arrangement was another palm-leave basket. At the center of the circle, an offering covered with a white cloth, on the top of it hanged a blue plastic bag, a bunch of ripe banana. On the top of them were placed an unfolded black umbrella. At the very top of this arrangement, a circle frame of bamboo plunk covered with a white cloth, and around it, a number of foods made from rice wrapped in palm leaves. They looked like a bead curtain.

The history of *bissu* in Soppeng Ina and their son told us was similar to what I heard in Segeri; it was the history of violence and oppression. Many of them were killed during repentance operation (*operasi toba*) led by Kahar Muzakkar, the leader of the radical Muslim separatist guerilla. In 1966 only few of them were left and performed their rituals in secret. Mak Ina remembered the first ritual they performed secretly after the operation only with four liters of rice as the main offering, since they could not ask for support from the community. "Now, you see many people come here to give their alms," Ina said. For the *bissu*, the alms were not only an expression of empathy, but also social status of the *bissu*. The alms indicated that Ina had a high status since they have many clients and disciples who came to support their ritual.

Many *hajis*," Nika said as they saw a group of women in their typical hajj gowns brought a bag of water bottles and placed besides the main offering. They brought the water to be blessed by Ina. The blessed water could be used for healing disease and warding off bad luck.

"Even those who have just returned from Mecca, they come here," Ardin said. Besides the alms, Mak Ina spent five million rupiahs for the ritual expense. In Segeri, Nika told Mak Ina, the minimum expense for any ritual was twenty million rupiahs. The difference, Nika said, might have been due to the socio-economic status and the procession of the ritual. After the conversation about the expense, Nika told their plan to hold the same ritual and invite Mak Ina. Mak Ina agreed. Ardin complained about the lack of the local government's attention and support. He said, the government knew the *bissu* were here and the rituals they performed, but the government just ignored them. The government did not see it as an asset, Nika added.

"I am not a *puang matoa*. Many people asked me to become a *puang matoa*, but I rejected it," Nika said.

"I do not perform *ma'giri*. If there is blood during this ritual, it would be a chicken blood," Ina said and laughed. Mak Ina's joke referred to a story widespread among the *bissu*. During a *ma'giri* ritual, a *bissu* bled. The people were very shocked, and among them, including the *bissu*, thought that they failed to fulfill the spirit's demand. But, later it turned out that the blood was a hoax; the blood was chicken blood.

"The *bissu* in Soppeng do not perform *ma'giri*, but it does not mean they they can't do *ma'giri*. They even can walk on burning coals," Ardin said, pointing to Ruga, the other old *bissu* sitting at the other corner.

"Why do we want to perform *ma'giri*, if *dewata* (deities) are not present?" Nika asked but needed no response.

"If spirits are present, even fire becomes unharmed, but if it is not, you cannot play, it would be very dangerous," Mak Ina added. Nika then told Mak Ina and us that they lived with their spirit, the strongest spirit in Segeri, but they kept rejecting him, since they were not ready. They could not sleep when they first time met the spirit; and he kept coming for three days. Nika brought the spirit to the *arajang*. They then felt secure with the presence of the spirit.

"I am very thankful, I do not need to learn from a *bissu* how to know my guardian spirit, He comes to me and guides me, He shows me His love and mercy," Nika said. Nika told Ina that

they came to Soppeng to meet a family whose spirit came to Nika's house in Segeri. Feeling ignored, the spirit cursed the family. Nika advised the family to perform *mabissu* to return the spirit and to lift the curse.

Nika and Ina complained about a *bissu* who claimed themselves as a high *bissu*, but they lacked knowledge on chanting and tradition. They only knew one chanting, and recited the chanting on any ritual and cultural events. Every chanting, Nika and Ina told us, had its specific function and context. They said a *bissu* had to know what chanting that was suitable for a specific event. It was a curse not blessing we received, Ina said, if we recited an inappropriate chanting. Before we had government, Nika said, we had the *bissu* that governed the society, therefore in each regency: Bone, Soppeng, Wajo, Luwu, and Pangkep in particular, we had *bissu dewata* (divine *bissu*). They had spiritual and traditional knowledge that enable them to achieve something that was impossible for ordinary people. Unlike in Soppeng where the people accepted *bissu*, in Segeri, Nika said, we found some people rejected the *bissu* because of their Muhammadiyah orthodox practices and ethnicities. Nika suggested that the Bugis people were more receptive to the *bissu* and more syncretic in their Islamic practices. And, the Bugis kingdom was more unified. Lapawaoi Karaeng Segeri, the king of Segeri, Ardin said, was also the king of Bone, his palace was located in Bone. Isessu, the first king of Segeri, was also a descendent of the Bone king, Nika added.

"The figure like Mak Ina is similar to the other *calabai*," Nika said. "But, *bissu* did not like being identified as *calabai*, since *calabai* is a pejorative term. *Calabai* is *maccola* (crude)," Nika said, correcting their previous statement.

Mak Ina and Ardin told us that the spirit came to Mak Ina mysteriously. Nika added that the spirit came to fertilize the land, everything would not grow without the spirit's blessing. Ina and Ardin agreed. They told me that the spirit was Sangiang Serri, the goddess of rice, the third *manurung* (the third deity who descends to earth). The old *bissu* like Ma Ina and Ruga had charisma, Nika said. Ruga was a *bissu* that came to our conversation after Mak Ina told us that there were only two old *bissu* were still alive in the area, "only two of us," Ina said while pointing to Ruga who was sitting at another corner of the room. Ina asked Ruga to join us. Ruga joined us but remained silent, sometimes nodded and smiled to give their agreements. Ruga looked like other modest Muslim Bugis women, in their sarong and veil. I did not realize until Ina told us that Ruga was a *bissu*.

Nika told us that there were three kinds of *calabai*: *bissu*, *pajoge* (dancers), and modern *calabai*. They have their own functions, *bissu* as priests, *Pajoge* as traditional entertainers, and modern *calabai* as modern entertainers. Yet, in many conversations, Nika also told me that Mak Ina and the other *bissu* often professed as *pajakka botting* (traditional Bugis wedding planner). Nika's information echoed what Mak Ina told us before when we first time we met, that they could not compete with young *calabai*, and they felt that it was the right time for them to focus to take of the regalia and served the community by performing rituals.

I remembered my previous conversation with Nika and the other local historians that the *bissu* functioned as bureaucrats, they did not profess outside of their roles as *bissu*, to govern and regulate farming communities and their lands. Yet, since losing the privileged position, they had to work to survive. There was an attempt to revive the position and gave *bissu* monthly salary, but it did not sustain for a long period of time. Puang Matoa received monthly salary from 2001 to 2011 during the period of *bissu* euphoria, the time when the *bissu* became the national and global spectacle. After this period, the *bissu* received lack, if not nothing, of supports. In many cases, they cancelled or postponed rituals because of lack of financial



supports from the government and the local communities. "The *bissu* change because they have to fulfill their economic need," Nika said. Having said that, Nika also warned that to maintain their status as *bissu*, the *bissu* had to resist the luxury and indulgence of modern life; they need to protect their traditions and rituals. Mak Ina interrupted and told us that they were sad when they see the young *calabai* ignore *bissu*, they did not consult a *bissu* when they performed rituals. The old *bissu* like Ina and Ruga remained marginal, even though the *bissu* performed every where during Bidin's leadership, Nika added.

When there were festivals, Ardin told us, Mak Ina and Ruga were the only *bissu* who performed *lalosu*, a dance performed by moving in circle and shaking *lalosu*. Nika interrupted and said that in Segeri, those who performed *lalosu* were not *bissu* but maids. *Lalosu*, also called *lalosu-arumpigi*, Nika added, was related to the Bugis myth of the marriage between a bird and snake that symbolized the marriage of the upper and the middle world.

A group of people entered the room. Two of them, *calabai* in their 40s, knew Nika. They asked what Nika did in Soppeng. "Important business!" Nika said and laughed. Nika told them that they came with the other people, pointing at me and their *to boto* and the other people who were waiting outside. Nika told them that their *to boto* had been living with them for ten years. His family was in Soppeng, Nika said. "I visit my in-laws, if you will, " Nika laughed. Nika introduced Haji Raoda and Haji Wati to me. Haji Raoda were entitled *angkuru*, the title given to those who had knowledge and charisma. Raoda was the leader of *waria* in Soppeng. Dressing in a blue tunic with long sleeves and a silk sarong with their hair covered with a green veil, I knew that they performed hajj, since that was a familiar outlook that I saw among Bugis women who had title haji. Haji Wati wore a golden braided head scarf, a white short-sleeve blouse and black pants, with a pink shawl on their neck. This is another outlook for woman haji, but in a casual manner. Daru, a *calalai* (female transvestite), looked casual with their short hair, red t-shirt and blue jeans. Nika joined them, while I stayed with Mak Ina and Ardin, and continued our conversation.

Mak Ina and Ardin felt that the *bissu* in Soppeng were marginalized. They were not known since all researchers and journalists only wrote on the *bissu* in Segeri. They were often called *bissu mamata* because they did not perform *ma'giri*. Yet, different from what the term invoked, they did not perform *ma'giri* not because they did not have spiritual capacity to perform *ma'giri*, but they wanted to remain humble and avoided injuries and curses. Mak Ina's son again pointed to Ruga, a woman in her 60s who could perform more than *ma'giri* such as walked on fire, which not all *puang matoa* could perform it. Nika who had just joined us listened and nodded in agreement. They were skeptical about *ma'giri* as an evidence of spiritual capacity. There many rumors, public secrets, that *ma'giri* could be done with a certain technique that needs no spiritual but bodily training.

Mak Ina asked me to come inside to a small room, right behind the living room. Nika stayed in the living room. On the steel-framed bed, covered with a red curtain, arranged beautifully was the offering. In the middle of the offering was the picture of Arung Palakka, posed with bare chest, long hair and red head scarf, holding a spear on his right hand. It was very popular depiction, more like painting than original photograph, of Arung Palakka. In front of it, a tray contained four bowls of white and black glutinous rice, and the right side stood a kris with brass-coated sheath carved with flower motif and a simple and common wooden hilt. A yellow bamboo fan unfolded was placed behind it and above it, an unfolded blue umbrella with brown and white flower motif, it was a common umbrella that we could find in market. Around them, arranged carefully candles, two plastic jars of rice cookies, a bottle of oil, a white

candle, several red candles, a glass of arack, and some brass boxes and tin cups. On the left corner I saw a small altar next to the bed, covered with red-silver cloth. I saw a plate of betel leaves and brass pots and folded silk sarongs. Mak Ina and her foster son explained the history of the *bissu* in Soppeng; Mak Ina explained in Bugis, and her son in Indonesian.

“You may take my picture and the regalia,” Mak Ina said. I was very pleased hearing that and took Mak Ina’s picture with their regalia behind them.



Fig. 8. Mak Ina and their altar. Photo by the author.

Again, Ardin complained that the *bissu* in Soppeng remained unheard on media because journalists and researchers never came to Soppeng; they stopped in Pangkep. I stayed around an hour, and returned to the living room. Nika curiously asked me about our conversation in the regalia room. I explained our conversation, and Nika nodded, agreeing on what they heard. Mak Ina showed up and joined us. "In the past, we are recognized as *pajoge* [dancer]," Mak Ina says, interrupting us. "Yes, the *bissu* also know how to have fun, they go out as *pajoge*. In Bone, they are called penari *angkong* [male transvestite dancers]. They are different, to seduce their audience they use *cenning rara*," Nika said, smiling at Mak Ina.

I was surprised that Mak Ina and Nika positioned the *bissu* with *pajoge angkong*. *Angkong* means *calabai* (female transvestites) that might not have a negative connotation like *calabai*, since the word is not a vernacular word, even some Bugis might not aware the term actually refers to a specific transvestites performers; *pajoge* was a familiar word, even for Indonesian people would know with intelligent guess that it means dancer, since *joget* was an Indonesian term for dance, but it was associated with mass dance we see among the audience of *dangdut* performance. *Pajoge* in the Bugis and Indonesian language invokes a certain imagination of mass that is associated with a low aesthetic practice, a form of art that exposes sensuality, a form of art that is aimed at entertaining their spectators. Female *pajoge* are treated

like prostitutes. Therefore, many local artists and dancers would not consider *pajoge angkong* and female *pajoge* as representations of Bugis culture. *Pajoge angkong* were associated with a low social class, peasants.<sup>234</sup> Many Bugis people found it was shameful to profess as *pajoge angkong*. Nurhani Sapada, an eminent Bugis dancer and choreographer, created *tari donda dondang* as a 'civilized' form of *pajoge* dance by maintaining modesty that is expected among the Bugis people.<sup>235</sup> *Tari donda' dondang* is more popular among local artists with high social class.<sup>236</sup>

As we sat, local people kept coming from everywhere in Soppeng. A group of young *waria*, from my conversation with them, most of them were college students in Makassar, entered the room. Among them, Haji Ramla, a *waria* in their 40s, wearing a yellow t-shirt, a white hajj cap, and brown pants, was the leader of *waria* in Soppeng. They were a government employee in the Soppeng government office. Among the *waria* and the local people, they were called *aji*, which was a common word used for those who performed hajj. "They also a *bissu*," Nika said. Ramla only smiled. Ramla told us that *waria* in Soppeng were very organized. They would come in any event held by *bissu* and *waria*. They also involved in politics. A young *Waria* told us that a Governor candidate even came to them and asked them to vote him. The candidate said that he supported *waria*. But, they knew that the candidate lied, since one of the *waria* who attended his campaign in Makassar heard him saying that *waria* were not welcomed in Makassar.

Several weeks later after Mak Ina's ritual, I received a call from Nika. "Mak Ina has just passed away!" Nika said. I wondered why Mak Ina asked me to take their picture. "Did Mak Ina know the ritual would be their last ritual, and I would be the last researcher they met?"

## 11. Wedding Ceremony in Padang Lampe

On Mach 22, 2013, we went to a local house in Padang Lampe, a village of Labakkang district. As we entered Padang Lampe, we sometimes heard sounds like knocks on the roof of our car. Not until the driver told us that he did not like driving in this village because there were too many branches of pomelos grew beyond the fences of the abandoned plantations, then I realized why the driver asked me to pay more. Pomelos not consumed locally but they were exported to Java. Yet, now they were abandoned because the price was low and it could not cover the expense that the farmers spent and worse, the water resource in the area gradually becomes shorter, since pomelos absorbed a lot of water, at least 2 liters daily for one tree, a farmer told me. Even, most farmers used motorized water pump to water their plantations. The farmers had been facing water shortage and it was more difficult to plant rice in the area. To survive, the farmers sold pomelos in their bamboo vendors on the edge of the inter-province road. There were three kinds of pomelo they sold: red, white, and *calabai* (the combination of red and white). I once stopped at a vendor, and bought a *calabai* pomelo.

"Yes, many people buy calabai pomelo, they want to taste it," the woman told me, laughing. "How does calabai taste?" I asked.

"You mean *calabai* pomelo," a woman from the vendor next to her asked me. I smiled and turned to her. She laughed, and told me, "the taste is *nano-nano*." *Nano-nano* was an

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<sup>234</sup> Kennedy, "Clothing, Gender, and Ritual Transvestism: The *Bissu* of Sulawesi."

<sup>235</sup> Richard Anderson Sutton, *Calling Back the Spirit: Music, Dance, and Cultural Politics in Lowland South Sulawesi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56–57.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

Indonesian slang, which means various flavors. The word came from nano-nano, a kind of hard candy known for its various flavors.

Forty minutes passed and we arrived at a stilt house inside a pomelo plantation. The house like the other houses I visited during my research was built on wooden stilts with tin roof and wall. On the left side of the house tent for guests was set up. The white and pink valances with glazing beads, which were common in Bugis traditional weddings, were arranged at the edge of the bamboo planks of the tent and ceiling of the house. It was a sign that the family was holding a wedding. Nika and Pirda, *calabai* and former *bissu* as they identified themselves in their 40s, served as *indo botting* of the bride, and Pirda the *indo botting* of the bridegroom.

During our conversation outside of the house, sitting under the pomelo trees, Nika and Pirda told me that they did not want to be identified as *bissu*, because they needed more freedom. But, they did not want to be called *calabai*, because *calabai* were not respected by the locals. They were noble *calabai*, they said, because their role in maintaining the local traditions in their profession as *indo botting* (traditional wedding planner). We entered the house. I followed Nika to the bride's room. I was reluctant but Nika begged me to get in and take the pictures when they were putting make-up on the bride.

Inside the room, the wall was draped with white and purple curtains. Desi helped Nika to prepare and select make-up. At the corner, an electric fan never ceased blowing fresh air, but still the room was too hot. I wiped my face with a handkerchief, once, twice, and three times, and never used it again since it was too wet. Nika and Desi's faces were glowing with sweat. The bride frowned. The make-up looked like a glazed thin layer on her wet face. I was amazed how careful Nika drew the lines on the bride face in the torrid heat of the tin wall. Completing the make-up, Nika took the brass headband with purple flowers motif arranged like a spreading peacock tail, and straightened some of the bent flowers, citing their *cenning rara* to make the bride looked more beautiful during her wedding. Nika put the headband on the back of the bride's head, pressed it gently, and put a purple plastic flower below it.



Fig. 9. Nika has just completed the bride's makeup. Photo by the author.

"With *cenning rara*, you didn't need an expensive make-up to make the bride look more beautiful," Nika said, smiling. "And, they will be beautiful for forty days."

"After forty days then she will turn ugly," Desi teased the bride. The bride grinned.

Nika told me that the hair style they created was *dessa*, or popularly known as Mickey-Mouse hair style. "Yes, without big ears," I said. They laughed. Nika completed the make-up, and we moved to the living room.

I realized that Pirda was waiting for us to demonstrate how they make up the bridegroom. Pirda only put a light makeup, combed his hair, putting on the costume, white long-sleeve shirt and sarong with purple glazing-bead flower motif. Pirda picked up a kris, pause and cited their chanting, inserted the kris carefully in the belt, and tightened it. They took a white-cloth headband with purple flower motif, and its front side stuck a set of red and green gem-stone brass flower, on its both sides attached brass chain with rose motif. Pirda combed the bridegroom's hair with his fingers, blew it and cited their chanting, and put on the headband. Everything was perfect. They took a cloth fan, and flap to the bridegroom.



Fig. 10. Pirda is making up the bridegroom. Photo by the author.

Pirda told me that they were a former *bissu*. They said they were no longer active as a *bissu* since they had a traumatic car accident. After the accident they vowed that if they recovered, they would not perform any *mabissu*, even though later they found out in the car accident no *bissu* were killed. The other reason Pirda stopped performing *mabissu* because they felt exploited. Nika agreed and said that they felt more appreciated when they served as *indo botting*.

Nika told me when somebody asked them to serve as an *indo botting*, they never mention their price. It is *cenning-cenning ati* (as you wish). The price depends on your economic and social status.

“If you are a rich and noble person, you want people appreciate you, therefore even though I don’t tell you, you know where your place is. And for the poor people, don’t push them, they already suffer. We need to help them,” Nika said.

It was almost noon, I saw the bride's family was ready. Nika went outside and wait until the couple and their family descended the stairs. "Where is her *indo botting*?" The people looked for Nika. Nika looked at me and told me that that was a kind of appreciation Pirda meant. Nika told the family that the couple was ready and the mother had to give her permission to descend the stairs. Nika had told her the procession. They then looked for the bride's uncle. A man with a mustache in his 50s showed up, throwing his cigarette and came to the panic crowd. "Here he is!" we heard a woman said. The man waited at the last step of the stair. The bride followed by the bridegroom and the bride's family. Most of the women wore veils. Padang Lampe was very well known with their Islamic piety, many *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) were located in the village. As the bride reached the last step, her uncle held her legs and carried her to the van. The bride grinned as her uncle lifted her. It was taboo for a bride to step on soil. She had to remain pure and clean until her first night, a woman among the crowd said. The bridegroom walked behind them. I was enticed by this particular event. This was the first time I saw it, even though I was born and raised in Southeast Sulawesi and South Sulawesi. I took the camera and

capture the memorable event. I could not imagine how the bride missed her family when she moved to another place.



Fig. 11. The Bride is carried by her uncle. Photo by the author.

"Take our pictures too, please!" The bridesmaids said and posed, ready for my camera. Nika and Pirda smiled at me. To cover my embarrassment, I shot them and told them that I would post it on Facebook. They just laughed.

We left the house at noon and arrived at a small, lonely seaport about thirty minutes. We did not have an option, since only one wooden boat with a capacity of twenty passengers docked in the seaport. I saw on the left side, in the distance, the tallest building in Pangkep, the tower of Tonasa, the biggest Indonesian cement company. The boat was a little overloaded. I saw people gave us a space to sit inside, but Nika and I followed the other passengers to take seats on the roof of the boat. I took a couple of picture along the way. After passing several islands, we saw Sabutung, the island where the bridegroom's family lived. It was a small island, the people told me you could walk around the island only in twenty minutes. The bride was put on a green plastic chair and two men carried her. Most of the houses were similar to I saw in Segeri and its neighborhood; tin stilt houses. The men put the chair in front of the bridegroom's house. We were welcomed with the performance of *mappencak*, the Bugis traditional martial art. The women from the porch threw rice over the bride and asked her to enter the house. The bride did not even look at them, remained calm on her chair. A man put a table in front of the bride. The people from the house came down put their gifts on the table. The women took the bride's hand and guided her to walk up to the living room, where she took a seat in a wedding altar located at the right corner with her bridegroom who was waiting in the altar.

It was almost dark when we left the house. The woman behind us appeared to be reluctant to leave and cried. She told us that she still remembered her niece when she was a little girl. "Now she moves to another house," she said, wiping the tears on her face. The other women came and cheered her up. The boat roared under the red sky. Sabutung lost in our sight. It was already dark when we arrived at the seaport. At the crossroad, I got off and took a bus to Pangkajene.

### C. *Bissu* Ciang

I met Ciang by accident. As I mention in Nika's story, I met them during our trip to Soppeng. On the way we stopped by at Ciang's house. When we met Ciang, their right eyes are bluish and swollen, apparently they had been punched. Nika teased Ciang, "KDRT [domestic violence]!" Ciang smiled. "Don't do a polyandry," Nika said and laughed. Ciang still smiled, but this time their cheek turned red. After Nika stopped laughing, Ciang told us how the incident happened.

Nika introduced me and I chatted a while before leaving. I told Ciang that I saw them in Rhoda Grauer's documentary film, *The Last bissu*. Ciang looked very different from the film. In the film, Ciang wore sarong, their face was plain, and let hair short black hair tangle or covered with yellow cloth. Ciang was nine years old in the film.



Fig. 12. Ciang in Rhoda Grauer's *The Last bissu: Sacred Transvestites of I La Galigo*.

Twelve years passed. Ciang that I met wore mini skirt, put makeup on their face, and arranged their black hair with brown highlight in a bun.





Fig. 13. Ciang in their salon. Photo by the author.

In our short conversation, I asked whether or not Ciang and Nika could perform *ma'giri* and how they viewed *ma'giri* since it was used to determine whether or not someone was a *bissu*. In the word technique, as I understood what Nika suggested was a technique in a vernacular understanding, i.e.: a technique that can be learned through physical - not spiritual - training. Therefore to perform *ma'giri* needed no spiritual skill.

On Tuesday, May 7, 2013, I visited Ciang in their salon located in Mandalle. The district is known as a rice granary. We could count how many how houses along the road. The fresh smell of mud was enough to portray how the life in the rice field. After several houses, we smelt something familiar, the burning banana leaves. "Modern *dange!*" the driver said with a grin. The traditional cake was offered in every *bissu* ritual I attended. Along the edge of the inter-province roads, I saw the long row of *dange* vendors. They offered three kinds of flavor: original, chocolate, and cheese.

After passing several stilt houses, we saw a pamphlet: Salon Chya serves haircut, bun, eyelash curling, wedding photography, makeup, rebonding, smoothing, tooth brace installation, and others. We knew we arrived at the right house. Unlike the other houses, the house was not built on wood stilts but on the ground. I would not call it house but a small modest cafe that we commonly found on the inter-province road. Ciang's salon was smaller than a one-bed room apartment, with two room: a room for their beauty salon with a capacity of less than ten people and a bed room. The house was made of wood, painted in white and blue. You did not need to ask how wet the area was, just look at the cloud of mold on the wall and the faded brown color of the rusty roof.



Fig. 14. Ciang's salon. Photo by the author.

When we entered the salon, a glass cabinet at the corner captured my attention with its colorful make-ups and instruments inside, carefully arranged. The driver and I were seated on the plastic chairs, while Ciang on the other plastic chair and their friends on the salon chairs. Two of Ciang's friends left.

"Today I had only few customers," Ciang said. "But, a week before *lebaran* [celebration after one-month fasting], we are always overcrowded," Ciang added, not waiting for my response. The size of the house was about 6 x 4 meters. The house consisted of two rooms, the salon which also function as Ciang's living room, and the bed room. In the living room, the wall was almost bare, only two posters of male and female hair styles adorn the wall. Ciang treated us with two cans of sprite and rice crackers.

I began my conversation with them with watching Grauer's film, *The Last bissu*. Ciang is very attentive, and sometimes they felt nervous, funny, and sad. And sometimes their friend, a girl in her mid 20s teased them, saying in Bugis: "that is Ciang when they were still a village girl," "still modest with their sarong," or "still original." Ciang responded with smile and said "yes, an innocent village girl." We watched the film with Ciang's friends, who often intervened and asked questions. I used this film as an ice breaker, because in the previous conversation, Ciang seemed awkward and responded with hesitation. This time I felt better than before, Ciang talked much about their life and family. But, it turned to be awkward again when I turned my recorder at the beginning, but later Ciang became a little relaxed.

Ciang told me that when they were interviewed in the *bola arajang*, or after a ritual, Bidin asked them to speak in Bugis, since the interview was seen still an integral part of the ritual, and no language was allowed except Bugis as the ritual language. *Basa bissu*, Ciang explained, was the covert language of *calabai* but it developed and picked up vocabularies from

the other languages such as Javanese and *calabai*'s Bugis slangs. *Basa bissu* today is known as a Creole Bugis language.

I felt that Ciang uncomfortable to talk to me. I was the only one who initiated a conversation and changed topics every time Ciang responded with short answers. The only way to break the ice was to watch Rhoda Grauer's *The Last bissu*. Fortunately, Ciang had not seen the film, even though they were one of the main figures in the film. Ciang told me that they were not aware that they were shot for a documentary film until all the shooting was completed and they were told by surprised that they were making a documentary film. We watched the film, and Ciang explained to me the scenes that they found interesting. Besides Bidin and their inauguration as *Puang Matoa*, the leader of the *bissu*, Ciang is another figure that is actually the main narrative of the film.

The film narrates the struggle of *bissu* to survive. Besides oppressions from the conservative Muslims, the other problem they have to resolve is the authenticity and the declining number of membership of the *bissu*. The old *bissu* are concerned with the inclusion of *calabai* in the *bissu* membership since they do not have spiritual capacity and traditional knowledge to become *bissu*. Even though they are required to do apprenticeship with the old *bissu*, their motives are often questioned; most of them are seen to be motivated by economy. The economic-oriented *calabai* is often called *calabai kedodonami* (inauthentic *calabai*). In the film, Bidin struggles to find their successor, and their dream tells them that they have to go to a small island, Samatellu Lompo of Pangkep, where they will meet a young *bissu*, Ciang, who was at that time nine years old.

Ciang tried to restrain their emotion but the tears on their face honestly concealed how Ciang felt when they saw the scene in which Bidin talked with their parents and asked their permission to bring Ciang with them and trained them to become a *bissu*. In the film, Ciang's mother cry, while their father avoids looking at Bidin's face and remains silent until the end of the scene.

"It was not the first time I met *Puang Matoa*," Said Ciang, wiping their tears. They met Bidin for the first time when Bidin and the other *bissu* visited an *arajang* (regalia) in the island. The regalia was a crocodile, placed in a room of a house. The spirit of the crocodile haunted the people in the island, and they invited the *bissu* to perform rituals to pacify the crocodile's wild spirit. Those who tortured the crocodile had to face their tragic deaths, as Ciang told me, some of them were drowned and the others killed by their own fish bombs. The crocodile laid eggs and only moved when its spirit inhabited a person's body.

"I am scared, I do not know. When I curse, it will really happen." Ciang paused. "I must be careful with the spirit I possess." Still in a strain face, she told me that in the past the regalia house and the *bissu* were revered. When they passed in front of the old regalia house, they were scared.

"The house was haunted," Ciang said. The house could not be preserved because of the damages caused by termites and water. It was replaced by the new regalia house.

"The new regalia house is less haunted," Ciang said. The new house, I was told, was used to be the office of the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN).

"Like the current *bissu*, they are less respectful. In the past, *Puang Matoa* is dreaded, they put *dessa* [black foundation that the *bissu* put on their forehead]," Ciang said.

Ciang come close when the camera focused on his father, and took a deep look into their father's face, Ciang's eyes reflected more than sadness and longing. They told me their father disciplined them really hard to become a boy. They used to flee from their house. The scene

when Ciang was cooking noodles for their friends was shot in the house of Ciang's friend, when Ciang escaped from their house. Before Bidin came to their house, Ciang had planned to leave their house and moved to Bidin's house in Pangkajene. Ciang's father did not allow them to become a *bissu*. He said that *bissu* conspired with Satan. Ciang did not agree and said that what the *bissu* performed was to heal their patients through the help of their guardian spirits. When Bidin came to their house, Ciang did not know about *bissu*, they were too young, at the time they were on the fourth grade of elementary school.

"Dad passed away five years ago," Ciang told me with tears on their eyes. Ciang rarely returned to their island, but their mother used to visit them.

In the scene of *Ma'giri*, Ciang pointed out some of the *bissu* who left *bissu*. They no longer participated in the *bissu* rituals and performances.

"It was sad to see the decline of the *bissu*. When Bidin was *Puang Matoa*, we were invited everywhere, and many *calabai* asked to be trained to be *bissu*," Ciang said.

Ciang was upset since the film did not record their initiation ritual, *irebba*. During the initiation ritual, Ciang, in white linen shroud, lied on a floor of a living room surrounded by the old *bissu*, chanting. At the end of the ritual, Ciang saw an *alameng* pierced into their neck, they were horrified, but they felt their neck hard like a stone, protecting it from the sharp tip of the *alameng*. Before performing *irebba*, they were scared of their guardian spirit. After Ciang became a *bissu*, Ciang was no longer scared of their guardian spirit, even they were alone at night on a grave.

"*Tungke'na lino* [royal spirits] inhabit only transgender bodies," Ciang said, in their tone I felt they attempted to convince me. During the *irebba*, they met their guardian spirit. Before Ciang became a *bissu*, the spirit used to come to them. They felt the spirit's presence when they could not move their legs and kicked their legs to free themselves. Yet, Ciang, unlike the old *bissu*, could not ask the spirit to heal patients (*massandro*) since to do that, they needed to purify themselves and to perform *sembahyang* (Islamic prayers).

Living alone without a family in Mandalle, Ciang earned living by serving the local people in their beauty salon. "I am lucky, if not because of *bissu*, I will not have this skill," Ciang told me when I asked them where they learned the skills to run their beauty salon. When I visited, I saw Ciang serving only one customer, a young man who asked his hair cut by pointing a picture of a hair style hanged on the wall. Ciang told me that their salon would be very crowded during lebaran, the celebration that marks the end of the fasting month. They could not serve all of their customers, even Ciang was helped by two friends. "Outside, we have a very long line!" Ciang told me, opening their arms.

"Young *bissu* need to survive, and we cannot just perform *mabissu*," Ciang replied when I asked them whether or not *bissu* were allowed to do jobs outside of the *bissu*'s traditional - ritual - duty.

"*Mabissu* is *mabissu*, salon is salon," Ciang Added. Ciang told me that they would not survive if they relied only on *mabissu*. What they needed was to protect the sacredness of their *bissu*-ness. Ciang differentiate their economic and ritual activities, and they did not see any contradiction between their job as a beautician and their role as a *bissu*.

Even though Ciang was proud of becoming a *bissu*, they left *bissu* because of the strict discipline. Ciang could not stand any longer to the humiliation under the name of spiritual apprenticeship. Ciang left Bidin's house and moved to their friend's house, young *bissu* Nika. From Nika Ciang learned the skills and management to open a beauty salon. Even though Bidin passed away in 2011, Ciang showed no willingness to rejoin the *bissu*. But, they still received

invitations to perform *mabissu*. After the death of Bidin, Ciang performed *mabissu* several times. But, when I told them that the *bissu* would perform *mappalili* at the end of that year, 2013, Ciang told me they were not informed.

"That was why I was hesitant to talk with you at the first time, since I almost forget all of my knowledge of *bissu*," Ciang said.

"The *bissu* is dying now," Ciang said and looked at the cars passing by on the street.

"But, I am not concerned."

I felt their hesitance in Ciang's flat tone. Did Ciang really leave *bissu*? I did not know for sure. What I knew they forgot several names of the old *bissu*. They were surprised when I told them that the old *bissu* they mentioned passed away several months ago.

Ciang told me that they never performed abroad like Rimah, Bidin's nephew, but their performances in South Sulawesi were incalculable. Ciang lost their kris, therefore every time they were invited to perform *ma'giri*, they went to Nika and borrowed their kris. *Ma'giri*, Ciang told me, was a spiritual call. They never rejected an invitation to perform *ma'giri*, even they had to pay for their own transportation.

"*Bissu* is not my everyday identity," Ciang said. What Ciang meant was that they did not look like a *bissu* in their everyday life. They did not wear sarong but mini skirt, they did not wear cloth to cover their hair but showed their long hair, even dyed it, and their face was not plain, but covered with makeup. With this urban outlook, Ciang could hide their *bissu* identity.

"In this neighborhood, no body knows me as a *bissu*," Ciang told me, looked at their friends and smiled. Ciang told me that when their friends saw their pictures in *bissu* costumes, they used to ask: "Was that you in the picture?" Why are you so different now?" In response to the questions, Ciang said, "sure, the past and the present are different!"

"Unlike the other *calabai*, we have a status in the society, we are respected," Ciang said, which became the last sentence of theirs I heard from my tape recorder at that day.

The following day I met Ciang, I found them joking around with four teenagers. One of the teenage girls was straightening her friend's hair. The other girl, who had a male outlook, drew a tattoo on the boy's neck. I met them before. They greeted me when they saw me. They remained in the salon and sometimes participated in the conversation, which I found very helpful since Ciang was relaxed and more active in responding my questions. It was really hot at that day, most of men I saw in the neighborhood did not wear shirts, including the boy sitting next to me. Ciang left the door and the front windows widely open, even though the salon was very close to the busy and dusty inter-provincial road. The tomboy girl left us and returned ten minutes later with two cans of sprites and a bag of crackers. I felt guilty I forgot buying snacks on that day.

"Oh, you are a *bissu*?" asked one of the girls, and that was the beginning of our conversation. But, Ciang's friends left us one by one, and at last I and Ciang sat in the salon. A customer came and interrupted our conversation, and Ciang asked him to come to another day. I told Ciang it would be fine if she wanted to serve their customer, but they told me, the customer just came to check whether or not the salon opened, because in the few last days, it had been closed. Ciang just arrived from their trip.

*Calabai*, according to Ciang, can become *bissu*, as long as they devote much of their time to learn the *bissu* knowledge: chanting, ritual instruments and their arrangements, *Basa Bissu* (*bissu* language), and *massureq* (singing the *sureq*, the Bugis folk narratives). *Calabai* who did not receive spiritual calls or did not have guardian spirits could become *bissu* through spiritual training. After initiation and their mastery of *bissu* chanting, spirits would come. The ability to

call spirits and trance were not natural, they can be learned as skills to become *bissu*. Ciang closed their long explanation at that day.

#### D. *Bissu* Mina

##### 1. Songka Bala

"How could we get there?" I asked Nika when we arrived at the edge of a broken fishpond embankment. That was the ruin from the last week flood. The condition was miserable. The flood came from everywhere, from the river, ocean, drains, and the broken dam of Tabo-Tabo. The local people told me that PU (the Public Work Office) renovated the dam last year, but it turned to be a disaster during the heavy rainy season, since it was not strong enough to sustain water stream. The dam was built by a German construction company several decades ago, and became the main source of water during drought season. In their desperation, the people told me that the government had to ask the German construction company to rebuild it. The cost of the failure of water management in Pangkep was enormous. The local farmers failed to harvest their crops and fish. Some of them had to pay their debts, and the others had to find the alternative jobs. While waiting for the water leaving their house yards, they stared at their farms, as if they searched for their missing coin in the ocean. From their eyes, I could tell their burden was unbearable. And, the government kept building and renovating the sand dam.

We saw several wooden stilt huts built in the middle of the fish ponds where fish farmers stayed to guard their fish ponds, especially during harvest time. I heard that many thieves came with pick-up trucks stole fish and shrimps at night and sold them in the nearby markets. We were lucky, we did not have to swim, the water was shallow, but it was hard to walk because of the thick mud. We took off our slippers and shoes and hold them. Some of the embankments remained solid, giving us a little relief. We saw Wa Mina's stilt hut. Nika called Mina, and Mina and their relatives went out, telling us that the water was deep, we had to walk around. We finally got to the house. Mina, their sister and foster kid and the other man lived in the hut. Mina greeted us, blowing smoke in their mouth, giving clove scent in the hut. Mina, unlike the other *bissu* I met, wore black t-shirt and black pants. No body could tell that Mina was a *bissu*. Mina remained silent, smoking their clove cigarette, blowing them twice. Nika talked with the man, who was Bidin's elementary-school class mate. Mina asked me to take a seat next to them. Mina told me that they were hired to guard the fish ponds, but nothing they could do. That time not thieves but water stole all the fish and shrimps. Mina looked very upset and tired.

"We stay here to collect what is still left from the flood," they told me.

Mina's teenage son and the man went to the other side, and went back with a bunch of young coconuts. They peeled them and made holes on the top of them, and put them in front of us. "Please," Mina said. I took one and drank.

I told Mina about the purpose of my visit. Nika intervened and explained my research. I told Mina that I would visit them in their house as I saw Mina seemed uneasy to talk about *bissu* in the hut. Nika teased Mina and said that we came that day to find out if they were still alive. Mina laughed.

I visited Mina several times, but the day on March 28, 2013, was not usual. Mina held a ritual of *songka bala*. Nika just dropped me off and left. Mina asked me to wait while they were receiving a call. Their house was located in Padang Lampe, a village in Labakkang famous for their pomelo plantation and pesantren (Islamic boarding school). The concrete house, like the

other houses in Padang Lampe, was built on ground with wooden-plank fence. In front of the house, there was a wooden yellow board sign:

Mami Salon:

- Wedding make-up and planning
- Gold plating accessories from Surabaya [the capital city of East Java]
- Clothing rental
- Hair cut.



Fig. 15. Mina's house and salon. Photo by the author.

A new red Honda scooter parked in front porch. As I entered the living room, I saw Mina's pictures in *bissu* white costumes with red headscarf. In the middle, hanged the popular picture of Arung Palakka with his bare chest and long hair, holding a spear. The same picture I saw in Mak Odah's regalia. Mina told me that a guardian of Lapawawoi museum gave him the picture during their visit in Bone. I expected Mina told me about Arung Palakka, but they told me about the royal man instead. The guardian was a royal old man. Mina realized that he was visually impaired when he gave them the picture. I did not know why Mina told me the story, but I knew that the picture of Arung Palakka for Mina was like the other pictures; they captured memorable people and events. The other pictures, the *bissu* with the costumes, were taken during their performance in France. Mina told me that before the performance, they took a walk around the city and got lost. Since all of them spoke only Bugis, the only way to communicate with pedestrians was by showing a brochure of the event that one of them brought it by accident. A kind pedestrian walked them to the theater, which was located only a couple of blocks. It was one hour before the performance when they arrived. They performed was the ritual of *Loangang*

*Lino* (world cleansing). They were invited by the France ministry of culture to perform in *Del' Imaginaire of Maison des Cultures de Monde* in 2006. They performed in two cities, Paris and Aureillac.

Mina told me that the ritual of *songka bala* at that night consisted of two processions: reading *Barzanji* by imam and his congregation, and *massandro*. Wa Mina did not agree on performing *mabissu, ma'giri*, in the *songka bala* ritual, since it contradicted the purpose of the ritual, to ward off bad luck.

"We cannot do something dangerous such as piercing or playing with sharp things during the ritual," Mina said.

We entered the regalia room. I saw a small altar covered with a red cloth. I saw inside earthen pots and candles, and a couple of water bottles. I asked Mina whether or not I could take the picture of his regalia. They politely rejected by saying that I should do it after the completion of the ritual. Mina took a seat and folded betel leaves. Some of them are simple, the others are folded in the middle and tied with a thread, and the others were complicated. Mina asked me to take a look at the small ones with complicated shapes. I was not surprised since I saw them in Ita's *songka bala*. I saw two open sacks of rice, and in the middle a big cooking pot filled with *lappa-lappa* (glutinous rice cake wrapped with palm leaves). On the right side, a tin tray as usual filled with a variety of foods made from rice: *apang*, *burasa* (a rice cake wrapped with banana leave), *baje* (a popular cake made from glutinous rice and palm sugar), and *onde-onde* (glutinous rice balls with palm sugar filling rolled covered with grated coconut). In the living room, the dish was also ready. The purple *bosara* (tin tray with stand and covers usually used during traditional ceremonies) and water cups were arranged beautifully on the purple-clothed long floor dining table. On the left side, several trays of foods were placed, including a basket of *lappa-lappa*.

It was 7 pm and the imam and his group had not yet showed up at 7 at night. A man told Mina that they would have come after *isha*, the night prayer which was usually performed at 7:30. Instead of waiting for the imam, Mina preceded and performed a ritual of *songka bala*.

Mina, wearing a white turban and a Muslim cap, went to the living room and sat down in front of a series of banana-leave trays arranged on the floor next to the wall. They placed their *alameng* against the wall, next to a tin tray of foods, a tin bowl of banana, and an earthen water container filled with several bunches of green leaves. Mina lit two red candles and put them on the banana-leave trays in front of them, and the home-made candle stuck on the banana, burnt the incense inside the clay bowl, and moved it around above the foods. He chanted, unheard, and took the bunch of green leaves and splashed the water onto the wall, to the right and to the left.

Mina moved to the regalia room where the *massandro* ritual occurred. Mina burnt the candles on the two sacks of rice, and on the regalia. Mina took a seat next to a woman. Mina's sister on the other side remained silent and stared on the floor, concealing her sadness. Mina took a cigarette, put it into their lips, the woman brought the incense closer to Mina's cigarette, Mina stuck the cigarette, which was still in their lips, into the burning incense, inhaling. Smoke vaped as Mina raised their head. In front of them, a bunch of banana and bottles of water were arranged, waiting for blessing. Mina took a ceramic saucer with a white paper parcel on it, chanted and put it away. People kept talking but Mina saw the palms of a woman carefully, searching a clue about her future. The woman next to her smiled. Several kids entered the room, between 7 to 10 years old, showing their palms to Mina. The room became overcrowded with the people who entered the room to ask Mina about their future. Mina took one by one the water



bottles, cited their chanting, and blew on it. Suddenly, I had short breath and asked Akkas for his permission to get out from the room. I feel better, breathing fresh air outside of the house.

When I reentered the regalia room, I saw a woman in her 50s looked sad and held Mina's hand. I did not know what happened and did not ask since that might have been a private matter. The room, 3 x 3 meter square, was overcrowded by mostly women. Only three men I saw among the crowds. Akkas told me that Mina was in trance and spoke in Arabic and *Basa bissu*. Mina looked calm and docile in their trance, he said. The spirit that possessed Mina had no name; He was called *puang pole ri ase* (the spirit from the upper world). Mina, still in trance, told a single woman that soon a man would come to propose her. The woman told Mina that she wanted to complete her college degree before accepting the proposal. Another woman came and asked for blessing and success for the business she did. After serving the two clients, Mina recovered from their trance and continued their *massandro*. "Unfortunately, you missed the trance!" Akkas closed his story.

Somebody called Akkas. He went out and returned. "The imam is here!" Akkas told Mina. We moved to the living room, and Mina greeted the imam and his people, all were men.

"Assalamu Alaikum," said the imam and his people.

"Wa alaikum salam," Mina replied and asked them to come in. It was at 8 pm. Mina and the imam took a seat in front of the offerings, facing the wall. Mina held his *alameng*, while imam cited his prayer. The imam moved and joined his group. The imam and his group took turn reading *Barzanji*. The imam closed the book of *Barzanji* and stood up, we followed. Imam cited his prayer of *songka bala*, and closed it with al Fatiha, the first chapter of the Qur'an. That was the end of the ritual.



Fig. 16. *Bissu* Mina on the right, wearing white shirt, praying with the imam during the *tola' bala* ritual in their house. Photo by the author.

I returned home at night, accompanied by some of Mina's relatives. Some of them wanted to see my wife and my sons, the others wanted to see Pangkajene at night. I told them that we could stop by the night market at Bambu Runcing, but unfortunately when we reached the main road it was raining and thunderstorm. One of them told me that she was not surprised, that was what was usually happened after Mina performed *songka bala*. And again, unfortunately when we arrived home, everybody had slept. I told them our house was always open any time, then asked the driver to bring them home.

## 2. Ritual of Three Nights in Bungoro

I was informed that Wa Mina would lead the ritual of *tellumpenni* (three nights) at Wa Nadir's house. Wa Nadir came to my attention at the first time when Mina mentioned his name for the first time when I visited a week before the ritual. Wa Nadir's house was located in the district of Bungoro, the cement and marble industry area. I called Nanang, the son of Wa Nadir, introduced my self, and my plan to visit him. Nanang, a man in his 30s, left his rice farm and worked at the Tonasa cement company, the biggest cement company in Indonesia. I visited Nanang and his relatives several times, but in this story, let me focus on the last day ritual of the *tellumpenni* to tell you the story of Mina, how they led the ritual and what happened at the night of June 13, 2013, which was the performance of the ritual after two days of preparation.

I took a *pete-pete* from Pangkajene and stopped at the traffic light, at the border between Pangkajene and Bungoro, and took a *bentor*. I asked them if they knew Wa Nadir's house, but none of them knew. I asked them if they knew the house where the *bissu* would perform a ritual, I received the same response. Even one of them told me that I stopped at the wrong district, and suggested me to take another *pete-pete* and continued until I reached Segeri. "Segeri, not Bungoro, where the *bissu* performed their ritual," he said with confidence. I told him that I called the son of the family, and he told me he lived in Bungoro where he invited the *bissu* to perform a ritual.

"You mean *ma'giri*?" he asked.

"*Ma'giri* is only one of the *bissu* rituals. Yes, they will perform *ma'giri* tonight," I told him.

"Why don't you just call the person and I could drive you there?"

"I would do it if I could reach him, but I could try again."

I tried several times, but I received no response.

"He might be very busy."

"I can give you a ride as long as you know the name of the village. We can ask the people in the village, they must know the person," he said and mentioned his price. Sapanang was a village located about twenty minutes from the main road. The road to the village was very crowded, the driver sometimes had to drive at the edge of the road to avoid the heavy trucks. I saw several passing trucks empty and the others from the other direction were full of cement sacks, sometime cement-mixer trucks. When there was no truck on our side, we could drive on the smooth asphalt road, but mostly we drove at the bumpy and dusty road.

"Could you close the cover?" I asked him, wiping my red eyes.

"But, it will be very hot and I could not see clearly?" he told me. I knew what he meant. Every *bentor* had a transparent plastic cover. They would use it when it rained.

"But, how would you drive if it is raining?"

"Yes, it's very dangerous, but we have to, we don't have an option," he said and smiled.

"Ok, fine then. I will wear my glasses and mask," I finally said. I looked at him on the back, on the driver seat, showing me his thumb.

As we entered the village, the *bentor* driver told me that it was easy to find the house, "they will have a tent or a sign that is noticeable to their guests," he said. But, we had turned around twice and still did not find Nanang's house. I told the pedicab that I went to the house before, and the road looked different. I called Nanang via his cell phone but still I received no response. I saw on my cell phone, there was no bar, no connection, which was weird since the complex was only about one mile from the main road. A neighbor told us that Nanang's house was located inside the bamboo fence. As we reached the fence, I saw Nanang, smiling running towards us. He told us it was a little tricky to find his house. And the road we took was the road behind his house.

"But, where is the front?" the driver asked Nanang in Bugis.

"Oh, you cannot drive, you have to get off at the kiosk," Nanang pointed to the direction, "and take a walk at the narrow path on the left side."

I paid the driver and asked him to pick me up around ten pm. We walked, passed an old wooden stilt house, and arrived at Nanang house. It was a concrete building built on the ground. The old wooden stilt house, Nanang told me, that was an *adat* house. He wrote a proposal to the government to renovate the house since it was too old and he was very concerned with the safety of his mother who still lived in the house. The office of tourism and culture accepted the proposal and agreed to give donation 100 millions rupiahs to rebuild the house, but since the house was an *adat* house, the office asked that the land had to be the state's property. Nanang rejected since their parents owned the land since several generations and the house served not only a site of memory but a proof of their royal status. Nanang's only hope was to ask for help from his brothers. One of his brothers agreed to fund the renovation if his land was sold. Besides the house, Nanang told me that they had an authentic scroll of lontarak that contained the lineage of their family. But, it was taboo to show it to anyone outside of the family.

The women were busy in the kitchen. I saw them bringing the offerings to the *adat* house. Nanang told me to take a look at the *adat* house. The house was painted in white and light gray, but from the distance it looked like unpainted because of the mold that covered the paint. The ground under the house was wet. It rained during the last several weeks. What made it looked different from the other tin stilt houses I visited during my research was the front wall were made woods carved with square motifs, and it was higher; the people who stood below the house did not have to worry their heads since even if they raised their hand, they would not reach the floor above them.

In the living room of the traditional house, I saw Wa Nadir's picture wearing a traditional cap of Bone, and black suite, and blue silk sarong, and next to it, several pictures of *bissu* in their costumes. Wa Nadir looked different among the other *bissu* in the pictures since his costume was different; he wore black suit and sarong. The only similarities he had with the other *bissu* were his head scarf and kris. There was a picture of a ritual, where Wa Nadir stood next to Bidin, in between them, stood a man holding a *teddung buburu* (a yellow silk-clothed bamboo-framed umbrella). Wa Mina and Wa Elling were among the other *bissu* present in the ritual.

Wa Nadir, according to Nanang, was also a *bissu*, but he was different. The other *bissu* were transgender but Wa Nadir looked like ordinary Bugis man. Among the pictures, there was one letter that captured my attention. It was a certificate from the University of Hasanuddin, a

state university in South Sulawesi, acknowledging Wa Nadir's participation in preserving the old Bugis texts. Nanang told me that the head of the project came and copied the authentic lontarak texts of the family. For the family the certificate was more than an appreciation; it was evidence that the family had the authentic lontarak that approved their royal status. Nanang told me that they had royal bone blood from Arung Palakka.



Fig. 17. Wa Nadir, on the left, wearing a black shirt and sarong. Courtesy of Mannang.

The offerings were familiar to those in the *temmu taung* (the year end rituals) I attended in Labakkang district. I saw a tin tray contained four plates with four colors of glutinous rice (white, black, yellow, and pink or red) and an egg placed at the center. At the central pillar of the house, which was wrapped with white cloth, was laid a *walasuji* with several bunches of paddy, a bunch of banana, a young coconut, and several varieties of foods made from rice, and on the top of it, placed diagonally an *oiye*. Attached to the central pillar was a cement water container with yellow coconut flowers in it. On the right side of the *walasuji*, sat two tin pots filled with rice and old coconuts and home-made candles. Several tin trays of rice were arranged around the *walasuji*. As usual, on the top of the central pillar was placed a bamboo circle frame with palm leaves arranged to resemble bead curtains. The only difference I noticed was the other *walasuji* lied at the corner of the house, next to the entrance door, wrapped with yellow cloth.

Wa Nadir passed away last week. The family felt that it was the right time to perform *mabissu* since they had not performed the ritual for about a decade because of lack of financial support. On my previous conversation with Mina, they told me that that Wa Nadir had a vow to slaughter a buffalo and performed *mabissu*, but he did not have chance to fulfill it until his

death. The expense was not cheap, but it had to be done since it was a vow, Mina said. Nanang told me that they spent around 40 millions rupiahs (around 4,000 dollars) for the ritual. Most of the money came from his brother who worked in Kalimantan. For those who had decent jobs such as government employees in Indonesia would think twice to hold the ritual, since they had to live without salary for ten months -- the average monthly salary of government employees with eight years of experience.

Mina came after the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer, wearing white headscarf and pink silk sarong, his left hand holding a flashlight and the right hand an *alameng* with a black bag in his arm pit. Akkas, wearing yellow shirt, green-yellow stripe sarong, and royal Bone cap, held the yellow royal canopy on his left hand to cover Mina. Three women wearing uniform: red baju bodo blue silk sarong, and veils, helped prepare the ritual offering. One of the women and a boy spread the red lellu above the offering lied down on the plastic carpet on the ground. The offering arranged in circle on a tin tray contained yellow rice in a silver picnic container at the center and small plates around it with variety of foods. On the left side of the tray, laid were a bowl of water for hand washing and a glass of water. On the right side, a man held a big green bamboo pole that reached the attic of the house. Behind Wa Mina, the drummers in black suits and sarongs with their Muslim caps held their drums - two of them holding drums and the other a brass gong.

One of the drummers came to the offering and cited his prayer, silently. He returned to his place and the drummers began to hit their drums. The people came closer; Mina gave instruction to precede the ritual. Mina unsheathed their *alameng*, held it vertically, and chanted in *Basa bissu*. The men and women were busy, prepared the offering, a woman burnt the incense in the clay bowl, and a man climbed the bamboo pole. Mina chanted with their loud voice. The man reached the attic, and Mina sheathed their *alameng*. I heard the voice of *gamaru*. Mina danced, while the women asked the man to pull the blue nylon rope. The other two *bissu* behind Mina joined Mina, danced. As the man pulled the rope, the *walasuji* reached half of the pole and stuck. Another man intervened and gave instruction. A man among the crowd with intense look told me that the offering was accepted if it reached the attic. But, I saw the climber struggling with the slippery bamboo pole and the light rain. Some women placed their hands on their mouths. I saw women shaking *oiye*. The climber entered the attic and the other man climbed to help. The other people helped with their flashlights. Mina stopped dancing and looked at the two men struggling to place the *walasuji* inside the attic. The bamboo shook. Everybody held their breath. Finally the *walasuji* reached its place, the drums stopped, and Mina took rice grains and threw them in the air. Mina walked up the stair and entered the house to prepare another procession, followed behind them, several offerings carried on the bamboo pole by the drummers. The offering consisted of silk sarongs, pomelos, banana, and rice cakes. What remained on the floor were another offering bamboo pole and tray. The old drummer sat with cross-leg position in front of the offering tray and cited his prayer. I saw on the street *pete-pete* and cars parking at least five of them.



Fig. 18. Wa Mina under the royal canopy is watching the *tellumpenni* ritual preparation. Photo by the author.

Inside the house, the people were busy preparing the other offerings. Mina, Mawar, Wati and the drummers took seats at the right corner of the house, with a curtain placed above them. The old drummer sat next to Mina. Lying down on the floor, Mina took a cigarette from their shirt pocket and smoke, *bissu* Mawar and the women tied betel leaves and foods in the curtain beads.

I heard the *isha* (night) prayer call from the mosque ended. Mina talked with the drummer. "Yes, it's the time," Mina said. Mina got up and took a seat besides the gong. He hit the gong several times with his left hand and held a cigarette on the right side. The drummers went outside. Mina waited until the drummers ready and hit the gong again. Wa Mina sat in silence and only talked to give instruction. "Ask the drummers to walk around the village," Mina said. I saw the drummers and several people walked away, then silent. Somebody among the crowd told me that the drummers disappeared in the forest near the village. It was the only path to the grave complex.

"Everyone must know, the living and the dead," he said. I knew why most people were concerned, not only the night became darker, but it was Thursday night, the night for those who were believers - and the non-believers but did want to take risk - when evil spirits and demons look for bodies to possess.

The curtain was closed. The old drummer and the other drummer, wearing a blue hat, casual shirt and jeans, beat their drums. The woman wearing a blue veil played *gamaru*, and the other woman gave several *oiye* to the women and a boy next to her and kept *lae-lae* for herself. The drums and *gamaru* turned louder, the women and the boy shook their *oiye* and *lae-lae*. I heard Mina from inside the curtain chanting, calling the spirits. The curtain shook, the drummer

looked at the curtain, and stopped beating their drums. The curtain was raised, the *bissu* then had dressed in their *bissu* costumes with their makeup. They looked different with their make-ups and costumes. All of them wore red silky *bissu* shirts, but different shawls: Mina wore silver one, Mawar purple, and Wati pink; different head scarves: Mina red with yellow flowers, Mawar red with pink flowers, and Wati yellow with white and red flowers; and different sarongs: Mina red with silver flower motif, Mawar pink with white flower, and Wati yellow with red stripes.



Fig. 19. Mina (on the right), Mawar (in the middle) and Wati (on the left) are receiving alms before performing *ma'giri*. Photo by the author.

We heard the voice closer and closer, the drummers finally returned. The oldest man among the drummers took a seat in front of Mina, placed his drum in front of them, cited his prayer silently and returned to his group. Suddenly, a girl with glasses in a casual dress came and met Mina. Somebody told me that she came to get blessing and to find her companion soon. She shook Mina's hand with an envelope on her palm, and returned to her seat. Mina started their chanting, singing. The women - only one of them did not wear veils, sat in a row, in front of the *bissu*, gave their alms to each *bissu*, shake their hands and returned to their seats. Mina stopped singing as the first woman gave them their alms. I saw a pack of cigarette and several five and ten thousand currencies on Mina's plate. Mina continued singing after the second woman.

After the session was completed, the drummers hit their drums. The *bissu* and two men from Wa Nadir's relatives, Ambo and Beddu, sat in circle in front of the *walasuji*. The drums started, at this time with *gamaru*. Mina took the burning incense in the clay bowl, waved above the *walasuji*, and passed it to the men next to them, the men and the other *bissu* did the same;

and Mina took another clay bowl, and repeated what they did before. Mina chanted and unsheathed their *alameng*. Their voice got louder, the drummers increased their tempo, and the *gamaru* voice became sharper. Mina stuck the tip of their *alameng* into the coconut flower, into the water, kissed it, and sheathed it. The music stopped, the *bissu* stood up and walked around the *walasuji*, singing their chants and touching the palm leaves. They took out the leaves and threw them to the crowd. The people asked the *bissu* to throw the foods to them. Mina talked to a man. The music began and the *bissu* started to dance around the *walasuji*. Mina stopped and held the palm leaves tightly, he looked intense.

"Hey! Hah!" Mina yelled. The drum responded with a faster rhythm. A man threw pop corns to the drummer. The drummer wearing shirt, casual hat and jeans, seemed undisrupted and kept his gaze on the floor, while their hands kept beating the drum. Mina unsheathed their kris, held it on their left hand and pierced their right palm. *Bissu* Mawar and *Bissu* Wati were watching Mina. Mina stomped their feet on the wooden floor and their face looked very intense. Mina moved back and forth faster, and in circle. Then placed his kris to his neck and pierced it. Mina yelled and stomped their feet, kept piercing with their left hand and their right hand held their head and push it to the front, to the kris. The people remained silent, some of them looked horrified. If I did not see this kind of performance before, I would have left the room. But, still I felt threatened when the *bissu* got closer to me, since you could not predict what happened. Suddenly I heard people from the stair behind me yelled, "catch him! Hey, catch him!" I looked at behind me, a man hanging on the window behind me was possessed. A man held him before he fell down. He was brought into the house and regained his consciousness. Ambo asked people not to hang on the window. But, they ignore it since that was the only space to watch the *bissu's ma'giri*.

Wa Mina remained undisturbed with the incident and kept performing *ma'giri*. They got wilder, more violent. Mina became uncontrolled and collapsed, their head bumped onto my knee. It was very hard. I could not move since one of leg stuck under Mina's body. I saw Mina's face, pale and wet. I remained still until one of Nadir's relative came and put Mina's head on his lap. A woman threw a white sarong to cover Mina's body. I put away my camera and helped to move Mina's body, I felt his body stiff. The people were silent. Abruptly a woman played the *gamaru*. An old woman inserted her face inside the sarong and talked to Mina. The burning incense was waved over Mina's face. But nothing changed. Ambo suddenly screamed, took off his Muslim cap, slammed it on the floor, and shook Mina's body. "Is that you, puang [an address to a royal person]?" He tried to appease the spirit. The old woman next to him also screamed and hit Mina's hands. Mina recovered and asked what happened.

I went out to take fresh air. I was talking to a person when I heard loud noise from the house. Ambo yelled, but this time his voice sounded comical. The drums played a fast-tempo rhythm, and the *bissu* walked faster around the man. I came closer. I saw Ambo standing in the middle like a conductor orchestrated the performance. The *bissu* unsheathed their krites, pierced their palms, chests and necks. The louder he yelled, the more violent the *bissu* performed. The *bissu* were more interactive with their audience; the parents allowed their kids to get closer. Some kids screamed when the *bissu* stopped in front of them and pierced their krites into their necks. The people laughed. Everybody was amused. The *ma'giri* ended at 11 pm. I checked my *bentor* driver among the crowd, but he did not show up. A man from Pangkajene offered me a lift on his Honda scooter. I got off at Bambu Runcing, the city park of Pangkajene, and bought *putu cangkir* (a popular traditional cake made from glutinous rice and palm sugar with shredded young coconut filling) from a street food vendor. From Bambu Runcing I took a *bentor* to return



home. A cup of hot tea with *putu cangkir* at midnight was the treat I deserved after the research long day.

### E. *Bissu* Japa

On December 20, 2012, Idis, my neighbor, told me that he would bring his wife to meet a *sandro* to find out the odd disease her wife suffered, and asked me if I would like to join them. Idis knew my research and we often had discussion on *bissu*. Idis and his wife were the *sandro*'s regular clients. They told me that the *sandro* was also a *bissu*, even though they say it with a visible gesture of doubt. Japa, the *sandro*'s name, did not join the *bissu* community in Segeri, but they were very popular among people in Pangkajene.

"Their spiritual knowledge is very strong!" he told me.

But, the following day, Idis told me they cancelled their plan. His wife, a kindergarten teacher, had to organize a school event. And, he himself, a high school staff, also involved in the event. Then, it was my turn to persuade him to accompany me to meet the *sandro*. He finally agreed and asked Irna, a *calalai* (a female transvestite) in their mid 20s, to join us. We visited Japa on December, 2012.

Japa's house was located in a rice farming area. We passed the housing complex and took a grass path under a big tree. The driver was hesitant, but Idis told him that was the only way to get to the *sandro*'s house. The car shook as it drove on the slippery muddy road. Fortunately the road was not long. We reached Japa's house, a concrete house built on ground.

"Assalamu Alaikum," we said.

"Wa Alaikum Salam," the people inside the house welcomed us.

"Hey, it's been long time not seeing you! Where have you been?" Japa said when they saw Irna. Japa wore glasses, a green, white and purple-stripe blouse and batik sarong. Their long black hair was arranged into a simple bun at the back of their neck. Irna and Idis introduced me to Japa, who spoke Bugis, Makassar, and broken Indonesian. I spoke in Bugis to make them comfortable to speak to me. Japa spoke in Indonesian a little, in Bugis and Makassar mostly. During our conversation, Japa addressed themselves with *tante* (aunt). They originally came from Boncindea, a village in Bungoro district, which was known for its cement and marble mining industry.

Japa no longer joined the *bissu* in Segeri. They complained that *bissu* had been manipulated. "We hurt our necks, but we are paid cheap," Japa said, inhaling deeply their clove cigarette.

But, they did not reject invitations to do *massandro*, which often required the performance of *ma'gendrang* (drumming) and *ma'giri*.

"The heart of *ma'giri* is drum. If the drummers play their drum well, we will be safe. But if not, do not ask me why many *bissu* do not live long," they said, unable to conceal their anger.

"If you perform *ma'giri* without drum, the kris will cut you," they said.

But cheap payment, Japa told me, was not the only reason they did not perform ritual or performance. They said, "I will receive anything people give me, I am not too orthodox with my *adat*."

"Then why do you stay home," I asked.

"It's better staying home than performing *ma'giri*. People watch us, not even know who we are. Are we entertainers or crazy people? See yourself how people treat us!" they said.

"Even *calabai* are now reluctant to perform *ma'giri*," they added quickly.

During a ritual of *mappalili*, Japa witnessed that *waria* (Indonesian term for urban female transvestites) who had not been initiated as *bissu* were also recruited to perform *ma'giri* to complete the required number to perform the ritual, forty *bissu*.

"If you invite *calabai* in their 20s or 30s to perform *ma'giri*, you waste your time. It's only performance!" Japa said.

"The duration of *ma'giri* performance depends on the expense; we can do one, two, or three nights. We can sing (*masabo*). You may invite me," they said.

Japa did not agree if *waria* performed *ma'giri*, and those who have *lakkaing* (husbands) had to be excluded from *bissu*, "they are not *bissu*!" they said. The only "*lakkaing*" that the *bissu* had was their adopted son. "We call adopted son as *lakkaing deki botting* [a husband that we don't marry]," they said. Japa had a adopted son, their nephew, who had lived with them for forty one years. He had married, but still lived with Japa in the house with his wife and children. Moreover, Japa explained, *bissu* needed helpers such as *inang bissu* or *dayang-dayang* (*bissu* maids), because they are not *bissu* if they performed all domestic routines.

Japa showed us their pictures performing *ma'giri* and indo botting. The picture captured my attention was that Japa in red *bissu* costume put the tip of their kris on their palm in front of the Bugis traditional wedding couple. It was a blessing ritual for the couple.

"Now, just look at some *bissu* who get rich because of *mabissu*, they are not blessed. They are rich, but they don't go to Mecca!" Japa said.

"But, isn't that *bissu* are not allowed to perform hajj?" I asked.

"You can, but you can't use both," they said. Japa told us a story of *bissu* who died because after returning from Mecca, they still performed *ma'giri*. *bissu* could remain *bissu* when they returned from Mecca, but, Japa advised, they could no longer perform *ma'giri*, because *bissu* and hajj had different vows, and *bissu* could not perform both vows at the same time. They had to choose.

"Did you see a *bissu* who has long hair and long beard?"

"Yes."

"It is weird, right?" Japa asked for my confirmation, but I remained silent.

"It had to be clear, you are male or female, you cut your beard or your long hair," Japa were still asking for my agreement. But, I did not find a way to respond them politely. Looking at me, without response, they continued.

"*Bissu* do not work in salon. Those who work in salons are *calabai*. *Bissu* is an institution. It has a rule, a chief, and members," Japa added. When *Puang Matoa Bidin* invited them to perform in rituals or festivals, they had to come.

"I have a more noble blood than Bidin, but I have to obey them because I revere *puang toa*, not Bidin," Japa said.

"I am scared to be elected as *puang toa* [Puang Matoa]. Did you see what happened to the elect *puang toa*? They do not live long," Japa explained and mentioned several *bissu* who died soon after they took the position.

Japa told me they were 69 years old. When they mentioned their age, Irna told us that Japa looked like 50s. Japa only smiled. They told us Mak Rusda was 75 years old, but she looked like never aging. That was the blessing they had as *bissu*, he said.

"The *bissu* put *daddasa* [black foundation the *bissu* put on their forehead] on their face, and their *daddasa* did not fade, and you know then when you meet them during ritual," Japa said.

He had traveled around Indonesia and abroad to perform in festivals, but he said, even a motorbike they did not have.

"I am *bissu makkasiang* [poor] because I have nothing, I am poor," they said.

Japa did not agree how *bissu* perform *malagaligo*, singing the *I La Galigo* (a Bugis epic poem). It required a ritual procession. Many *bissu* ignored it, and they became ill after the performance.

Japa told us that *bissu* were diverse. They knew a Tionghoa *bissu*, *Baba Sandro*, who lived in Makassar and passed away several years ago.

"All *bissu* are *sandro*; you are not *bissu*, if you cannot perform *massandro*!"

I remained silent, waiting for their further explanation.

"Not all people like us; if you hate *bissu*, don't look at me, I am still alive!" they said.

"Muhammadiyah calls us *bissu* genies, but I don't care. You will know when spirits haunt you!" they added with a sneer. I nodded, showing my empathy.

Japa changed their topic and told me about the spirit who inhabited the regalia room. Puang Salama, the name of the spirit, wore white and green cloth, they said, trying to portray the spirit's outlook. When we entered the regalia room, Japa greeted the spirit in Bugis in a casual but respectful manner. They told him about my presence and intention to meet him. In front of the regalia, we continued our conversation. Japa looked shocked and immediately corrected me when I mistakenly mentioned the spirit's name. They then talked to the spirit, asking for his forgiveness for my mistake. I also apologized, and Japa gave me a gesture which I understood that my apology was accepted.



Fig. 20. *Bissu* Japa is explaining the spirit in the altar. Photo by the author.

Japa explained it was hard for them to persuade him to descend from where he lived, the seventh heaven where he lived. It was an expensive ritual to move the spirit from the old regalia house to the new house, and they had to wait until they had enough money. They collected money little by little from their performances and *massandro*. Japa could not help crying when they told me how hard they struggled.

"We did everything, but the spirit would not come down," they said, smoking and looking at the altar in front of them. "Until I invited sixty *waria* to perform *qasidah* [Islamic traditional music]." I saw Japa taking a deep breath as if the event had just occurred. Japa showed me the old regalia house, where the spirit used to live. It was a small stilt bamboo house with thatched roof located next to the main house. They did not demolish it since it reminded them of their hard life with the spirit.

Japa explained to us that *bissu* originally came from Luwu, not from Bone as most people knew. Gowa used to have *bissu*. *bissu* were still necessary even though the society had been modern, Japa said. And, even the government still respected *bissu*. "We are seated on the front row in governments' ceremonies," Japa said.

Japa looked at the wood frame of the house and said that every tree had its *sandro*. And, iron wood (*aju bitti*) had *sandro bissu*. They pointed to the frame and said that the woods were ironwoods.

As usual, I did *mangolo arajang* to ask about the life of the spirit the *bissu* have. I sat down on the floor, but Japa asked me to take a seat on the stage next to the altar. The altar was made of woods, shaped like a small bed with one meter square, covered with pink mosquito net. At the front edge, a red and grey Muslim praying mat draped, on the right side, leaned against a pillar of the altar was an *alameng*, and on the left side, an earthen bowl with betel leaves and white and red candles in it, and a tin cooking pot with lead. Inside the altar, there were offerings, at the center a palm leave basket and yellow and white cloth, and on the right side, there were several bottles. Japa lit the candles and put them on the offering plates. Irna gave me a white ceramic saucer where I placed my offering. Japa put on a white turban on his head and placed hajj cap on it, pressed it to sustain the cap on their head. Their son's wife came and gave their kris, without sheath. Chanting, they touched the tip of their kris to the offerings inside the altar, to their tongue, and finally to the offering at the center inside the altar.

I thought it was done, but I was surprised Japa began to twist and pressed the kris on their palm. Placed the kris hilt on the floor and pushed the kris tip with their neck. They stood up, fixing their sarong, and performed *ma'giri*. He placed the tip of his kris carefully to their neck, while talking to me, twisted it, stomping their feet on the floor. They placed the hilt on my right shoulder, and pushed the tip of the kris with their neck. They looked at me, asking for my response, I nodded. They then moved the hilt to my forehead and again push the kris tip with their neck. They bowed down, pointing to the *arajang* with their open palm as if they just performed on stage. They placed the kris inside the *arajang* carefully, with the tip on the top.

"What you see is only for promotion. I am not a *puang matoa*, I am only *bissu pammaseng* [poor], what has just happened is possible because you and me," they said with a grin. We moved to the living room to finish our tea. We left Japa's house before sunset.

## F. *Mappalili*: the Joy of Water

*Mappalili* is an annual ritual performed during rice planting time, usually on November. What makes the *mappalili* in Segeri different from the *mappalili* in the other districts in Pangkep

and the other regencies is that it is led by the *bissu*, not by *pinati* (male ritual specialist). I thought I missed the *mappalili* in 2012, since I was busy searching for a house to rent. But, I was told that *mappalili* in 2012 was not performed because of lack of donation. I thought it was also related to the death of the leader of the *bissu*, *Puang Lolo* (the rank below *Puang Matoa*) Upe on September 2012.

"We must know! You see the tree in the market yard, that is one of the places they put offerings," said a *bentor* driver who operated in the market. I saw an old bamboo *walasuji*, looked like not from this year.

"*Mappalili* is an obligation, or disaster will come! I know a situation like this will happen. And it happened in the past. *Mappalili* is not a celebration, few people are enough to perform it. We did it in the past. If people don't know about *mappalili*, this is because they don't care!" Patta said during our conversation in his house.

On August 2013, I was informed that *mappalili* would be held on November. On the last week of August, I stopped by Ciang's salon to chat. I asked them about *mappalili*. "No, I don't know," Ciang said. They told me *mappalili* was not well organized and many people did not care. The following week, Nika told me that *mappalili* was postponed until December 1 because of the heavy rain and flood in Segeri. They also informed that *mappalili* would be shortened only in three days due to lack of donation. This was the reason my family and I returned to Makassar, since the house we rented in Pangkajene was located right in the middle of flood area. Behind it was rice field and fishpond, on the front Pangkep River used as the main transportation by people from the islands around Pangkep, and the right side the ocean, and the left side the market. At the end of December 2012, when Tabo-Tabo Dam collapsed during the heavy rain in the same time as the high tide of the ocean, we were trapped in the middle. But, I was very thankful I had many friends who helped me to keep informed on the *bissu*'s activities in Pangkep. Driving from Makassar to Segeri, without traffic, took about three hours.

*Mappalili* was supposed to be performed before farmers tilled their rice fields. But, it was done after the plantation time. Nika told me that it was taboo to plant rice before *mappalili* was performed. "Today, farmers do not care anymore. *Mappalili* seemed no longer sacred. But, you see, rice crops fail, flood destroys rice field," Nika told me on cell phone.

Finally after several changes, *mappalili* was done from December 3 to December 4, only for two days. We came early in the morning on the first day. Only a few people showed up. They helped the *bissu* to prepare the offerings, folding betel leaves, cooking, and decorating the ritual ornaments. Patta gave instructions what need to be prepared, while coming back and forth bringing everything needed for the offerings.

The offering, as usual, contained white, yellow, red, and black glutinous rice, egg, betel leaves, traditional foods, and banana. A red canopy was brought out and placed above the pile of paddy. The drummers play their drums as an announcement to the neighbors that the preparation of *mappalili* had just begun as well as an entertainment for those who were preparing the offering. Nika, Ciang, Mina, Mak Rusda and Isah did not come.

On the yard, kids were playing, riding a Harley-Davidson bicycle, fighting, running, as if we were not there looking at them. They were so loud, that the woman had to tell them to lower their voice. The drummers were checking their drums. In the middle of the wall, hanged Haji Sake's photo in their *bissu* costume, the leader of *bissu* before Saidi. Mina joined us but left before the performance of *malekka labbu lalle*, a ritual of giving offerings to Segeri river and the sacred tree named *labbu lalle* located in the parking lot of the market. in Segeri market, but

promised to return after maghrib. I expected Nika, Ciang, Mak Rusda, and Isah among the *bissu*, but they could not join until the end of *mappalili*.



Fig. 21. The sacred tree of *labu lalle* in the Segeri Market parking lot. Photo by the author.

I saw the drummers sat at the corner with their familiar formation, ready to hit their drums. It was a sign that a ritual was about to happen. I took my camera and sat close to the *bissu*. The *bissu* prepared to take out the sacred ploughs from their altar. The drummers hit the drums, the *bissu* stood up and walked to the regalia room where the sacred ploughs were hanged. The burning incense were offered to the arajang. A man climbed on the attic to release the rope. The rope was released, and the *rakkala* were brought to the main room, a large veranda. The overlapping conversation was heard as the people gave instruction and warnings when they carried the ploughs. They laid down the ploughs on the floor and opened the white cloth wrap.

Patta gave instruction, while looking at his cell phone. The drum stopped for a while. A brass container of water was placed next to the head of the *rakkala*. The other buckets were also ready to wash the *rakkala*. The drum started. Juha initiated the cleansing by washing the head, and the other people followed. Every body was silent. I saw some people filling their plastic bottles with water from the plough. Some people washed their faces with the water. The buckets were empty. The banana leaves were brought to cover the *rakkala*. The people began talking and looked more relaxed than before. The clay pot of burning incense was given to Juha. Juha waved it around above the *rakkala*. The procession was complete. I heard my camera blipping with the red color. As I walked at the corner to replace the battery, I saw a man sitting on the bench in front of the house next to the regalia house, talking with someone on his cell phone. He did not even look at us. This might be the answer why few people participated. When I returned, I saw the *rakkala* was placed on a white kapok pillow. Patta kept giving instruction

and make sure everything was done right. The drum stopped, the *rakkala* was then completely wrapped with banana leaves. Several bunches of paddy were piled up next to the arajang. The *bissu* and their helpers prepare to arrange the feasts on the both sides of the arajang, the head and the feet.

Around 2 pm, I joined two *bissu* to perform ritual at the Segeri River and the market. As we walked to the river, we were accompanied by the drummers who hit their drums along the way. Wa Elling performed the ritual of river offering. Wa Elling and a man returned to the regalia house. We continued with Rameng's group to perform ritual at the sacred tree, *labu lalle*. We walked followed the rhythm of the drums. As we reached the location, under the tree, parked a motorcycle with a big deck. Some people came to help, pushing it and left it in another parking space. The drummers took a seat in circle on the ground. More people came to see. Rameng opened its sarong bundle, and took an M-150 (a popular energy drink) bottle of oil. The man lit the small red candle and incense. Two coconuts were placed next to the burning incense. Rameng spread the oil with their fingers to the tree, while the man opened the bundle and take out a bunch of banana and placed it under the tree. Rameng unsheathed their *alameng*, chanting. After the ritual complete, the man gave the banana to the other man. He took a banana tree that was already prepared on the site. He wrapped the banana tree with his sarong hanged around on his neck and took a *bentor* to return to the regalia house. In the regalia house, Juha was preparing for another ritual. I saw the banana tree was tied to one of the pillars where the offerings would be arranged.

By 5 pm, the offerings were beautifully set up on the two main pillars of the house. In the middle, as usual, the main feast was laid. A banana tree in the middle tied to the main pillar of the house, next to it an earthen clay with water and coconut flowers in it, and around them are arranged young coconut tree, several bunches of paddy and banana, *lalosu*, *arumpigi*, *lae-lae*, and *gamaru*. On the top of it, the coconut leaves arranged in circle, looked like a canopy. On the other pillar, we find the same coconut leave canopy, but this one on the top of it covered with red cloth with white, brown, yellow, and orange stripes, with golden plastic beads. Under it, the paddies were piled up. In the middle, an arrangement of feasts covered with banana leaves that connected the two pillars. *Dupa* (earthen pot of incense) was ready in the middle. The last work was to tie the *lappa-lappa* (traditional rice cakes wrapped with coconut leaves) and the other traditional cakes on the coconut leaves. When it was finished, the foods looked like beads, hanged on the ropes. All of the preparation was completed before *magrib* prayer.



Fig. 22. The feast for *mappalili* is ready. Photo by the author.

The gong was hit three times, indicating that it was time of *magrib* prayer, which is performed three *raka'ah* (repetition of prescribed movements). After *magrib* prayer, another ritual started. All of the *bissu* wore sarong, white veil or head covers, and casual shirts. Juha wore a batik shirt. Juha chanted, strewed popcorns. They looked at Patta, asked him to sit next to them, and passed, and passed the burning incense. Patta took it, placed on the floor - it looked like he cited something in silence - and passed it to the *bissu* next to him. After the *dupa* reached the last *bissu*, the drummers started beating their drums. A woman in her 60s wearing veil played the *gamaru*, and a man with a *lae-lae* joined. Juha moved, faced the *rakkala*, chanted and threw popcorns on the *rakkala*. They took their *alameng*, touched its tip to the left and right side, unsheathed and held it vertically. Juha raised their voice, chanting. Silent a moment, they stood up, followed by the other *bissu*. The drummers changed their tone, the *bissu* started dancing, shaking *lalosu-arumpigi* with their hands. The *bissu* paused to put down their *lalosu* and *arumpigi*, again the drummer changed their tone, this time more energetic. The *bissu* began to dance with their graceful waving hands, more enthusiastic. Completing their dance, the *bissu* returned to their seats.

The call for *isha* prayer was heard from the mosque nearby. Pangkep was known not only as regency of a hundred islands but also regency of a hundred mosques. *Adzan* (the call for prayer) was heard at regular time, but often people did not stop their activities. And, every time I went to a mosque I found less than ten people. *Adzan* became a way of telling time. Social events were usually arranged around the prayer times.

After *isha*, the regalia house was cramped with many people who came to see the *ma'giri*, which would be performed at the end of the ritual tonight. Among them I saw a group of



college students (I could tell from the blue jackets they wear) and local journalists (from their name tags). The *bissu* entered the regalia room. The door was closed. We were waiting, some impatiently. The *bissu* went out with makeup on their faces and in their *bissu* bright colorful costumes - at this time were dominated by green and red head scarves. Tonight the ritual was led by Juha and Mina. Mina sat in front of the *rakkala*, on the right side across the *rakkala*, sat Juha. Both of them recited their chant and threw popcorns on the *rakkala*.

The *bissu* stood up and held the coconut leaves and sang their chants, without drums. Mina held a *paccoda*, a ritual instrument made from a wooden log and wrapped with yellow cloth. The *bissu* took the *arumpigi* and *lalosu* laid on the *rakkala* (the sacred plough), the drum started. The *bissu* started dancing. A man in his 50s walked around in the middle and yelled at the *bissu*. Wa Mina fell down, in deep trance. *Ma'giri* pauses, Mina was taken inside the regalia room, the *ma'giri* performance started again. One of the *bissu* got close to a woman who was recording, she retreated and looked scared. "It's ok," said a man. Wa Elling laid down right in front of me; I had to withdraw a little to the back to give them a more space. They whirled while pierced their neck with their kris. Rismah, a young *bissu*, sit down in front of the man, place their kris hilt on his knee, and pressed the tip of the kris with their neck. "C'mon hit it," the man said, smiling to the crowd. The *bissu* ended their *ma'giri*. They took the foods tied on the coconut leaves and threw them to the crowd. The people push one another to grab the foods. They yelled and laughed. The *bissu* gathered in a group and posed for pictures. After several clicks, they dismissed. People yelled and gave their applause.

I thought the performance was over. Some people had left. But, I saw the *bissu* sitting around Mina, listening to Mina's instruction. They stood up. Rismah in the front, stood and picked up a stick, followed by the other *bissu*. The *bissu* on their back held Risma's back. They walked around. The way they walked looked like an old man with his stick. They stooped around, the two *bissu* on back cover their faces with their headscarves. The sound they made was not chanting, but crying. Even though we saw their shy smiles on their faces in performing the act, but I feel that the message they wanted to invoke was sadness. It was the story of *Nene' Laulle* the enacted, I thought. The story starts with the coming of two *bissu* to a *sandro* to ask him to heal *Nene' Laulle*. The *sandro* tells them that he cannot heal her. They go to the several *sandros*, but they receive the same answer. Finally, they come to the most powerful *sandro* who lives in Mount Latimojong, the highest mountain in South Sulawesi. This *sandro* tells them that *Nene' Laulle* must die because it is her destiny. The *bissu* then cry to show their condolence. In another version of the narrative, the *bissu* blame one another for the death of *Nene' Laulle*.<sup>237</sup> But, later I found out that it was not the story of *Nene' Laulle* the *bissu* perform. The performance was actually a critique to the community. The *bissu* lamented the ignorance of the community, who just came but did not give their contribution to the ritual. Hearing the information, some of us went inside the regalia room, met the *bissu* and gave them alms.

On December 4, when we arrived at the relic house, we met a group of elementary-school boys with their Barcelona football club jerseys - only two numbers I saw: 10 (Messy), 11 (Neymar) on their back - lining up, holding the national flags and yellow flags (Segeri's flag). The jerseys were donated by a generous businessman in Segeri. The stairs were covered with white cloth. The sacred ploughs were laid on the floor covered with banana leaves and surrounded by the offerings. On the back corner, the *bissu* with their colorful costumes, sat in

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<sup>237</sup> Nonci, *Upacara Mappalili sebagai Awal Bekerja di Sawah* [Mappalili Ritual as Beginning of Rice Planting] (Makassar: CV. Aksara, n.d.), 30-32; Syahrir, *bissu*, 45-46.

circle, in the middle, laid eight *walasuji*s. Six *bissu* attended on that day, Juha, Rismah, Wa Eling, and the other three *bissu* whom I met for the first time: Rameng, Lela, and Dira. On the back, sat in a row a group of men with green t-shirts written on the back: *Pesta Rakyat Arajang Segeri 2013* (Folk Festival of Arajang, Segeri, 2013) with the picture of Saidi and the other *bissu* performing the ritual of washing the sacred plough, the drummers and the kids. The *bissu* heard Patta's instruction. Juha performed a brief blessing ritual for the feasts. The helpers stood up and took the *walasuji* outside of the bola arajang. One of them brought a *walasuji* inside the regalia room. The *bissu*, Patta and the helpers opened the banana leaves. Jokes were sometimes heard, smoke from the clove cigar never ceased. The drum was heard, but it was not continuous, only two or three knocks, stopped, and started again in the same rhythm. Two helpers carried the big plough on their shoulders, and a man in a traditional Bone costume the small plough.



Fig. 23. *Mappalili* convoy. Photo by the author.

We walked to Segeri River, where the offering was given and the big sacred plough was drowned to touch the bottom of the river. People came out to the street to see the convoy. The kids and the helpers, Juha, and a man wearing Bone costume holding a spear and leading the convoy walked barefoot. Juha along the way covered with the red canopy. We arrived at the river nearby the main road. A small crowd gathered on the bridge. The river was not deep, but the men struggled to hit the bottom of the river. Black mud emerged on the surface. Juha were chanting on the edge of the river, with burning incense in front of them and *alameng* on their hand. Some people looked panic, but a man among the crowd told them to calm down. The men dived with the *rakkala* in their hands, and came to surface, with smile. Everybody relieved.

We then walked to the graves of the Puang Longki. Along the way we stopped at two places and gave offerings: at the big ara tree on the edge of the road and the tree in the middle of the fishpond. As we reached the graves assigned by three rocks, the *rakkala* was placed on the ground next to the graves. Patta sat in the middle and gave instruction. Next to him sat the *bissu*. Juha opened a bottle of oil and spread it to the head of the plough. People came, touched the oil on the rakka and wiped it to the other parts of the plough.



Fig. 24. The sacred plough is touching the ground, placed next to the Puang Longki grave. Photo by the author.

Juha chanted in silence. The drum started, Juha stood up and unsheathed their *alameng*, holding it vertically, and chanting this time louder. Juha sat down, took a drop of the blood from the chicken's comb with the tips of their fingers and washed them on the *rakkala*. They repeated the procession several times. Juha and Patta took the offering foods and gave them to the people. What followed was predicted, people came and grabbed the food. Some people ate the food in the area, and the others wrapped and brought them home. Nothing was left in the *walasuji*. We walked back. A man was waiting at the edge of the fishpond with a bucket, and threw water to everybody. Shortly, the situation changed. Everybody splashed one another. A man pushed another man until he fell in the fishpond. He took revenge and ran after everybody. We ran to escape. I was concerned with my camera, so I ran as fast as I can to the main road. Patta reminded the people not to splash those holding cameras, but this time they did not listen. I felt safe when I reached the main road, but not long until I looked at my left side, a huge crowd of people waiting on the edge of the road ready with their buckets. Yelling and screaming did not help. Everybody who passed the street got wet. "It's time to save my data," I said to my self. I wrapped my camera with a plastic bag and walked. Ria, my wife, walked behind me, hiding. But, an old woman in her 60s chased her. With a bucket full of water, she said with smile, "this is

healing water, you have to get wet!" We all were wet. We walked to the market where the last offering will be placed under the *labu lalle*. As we reached the tree, a *walasuji* was laid under the tree, the feet of the plough was hooked on the branch of the tree, while the head carefully placed on the ground. Juha performed a ritual of offering, and showered the plough. I saw plastic bottles arranged in the circle around the tree. The men and women took the bottle and fill it with water dripping from the *rakkala*. People started storming the area, took the offerings, foods and the water bottles. Some wiped the *rakkala* with their hands and washed their faces with their wet hands. The *bissu* stood up and performed *ma'giri*, but only briefly since they received less attention, yet drew more crowds to the tree. Anyone tried to reach the *rakkala*, they did not care if they had to get splashed. I saw Nika and Desi among the crowd, smiling to us while wiping their wet faces. This was the time when people gathered without questioning the practice that they consciously or unconsciously had participated. With the plough, water, and the *bissu*, the people rejoiced. They might not have known that was the blessing they received from the *bissu*, yet they shook the *bissu* hands, expressing their gratitude, if not for the blessing at least for the joy, if not for the prosperity in that year at least for happiness at the moment. We returned to the relic house, leaving the market with the people waved their hands behind us. The crowds still gathered on the edge of the road, with their buckets and bottles, and took drips left from the plough. As we reached the regalia house, Juha stopped and sat on the ground. The *rakkala* was placed in front of them. This was the last blessing ritual before the plough was returned to its altar.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

#### Paradox Life

Who are then the *bissu*? Are they gender identity or ritual role? If they are a gender identity, we will find the *bissu*'s claim: "all *bissu* are *calabai*, but not all *calabai* are *bissu*" is not valid, since among the *bissu* we find women and men. Yet, if the *bissu* are ritual role, why do we scholars keep associating them with transgender people? Is this because we live in the society of the spectacle, to borrow Debord's term,<sup>238</sup> Do women and men not conjure up an ancient imagination that we try to invoke through the representations of the *bissu*? Or, do we expect transgenderism provides us a site of conflict that is central to our narrative?

Self worthiness, being oneself - genuine self, how to embody a gender role, why moral values matters, are among many reasons draw us to conduct research on transgender and transsexual people. But, one thing that is more important, I learn from the *bissu*, how you appear and you move is not merely an aesthetic matter, but also life and death matter. It is not only how you would like to be accepted, but also to what extent you go beyond the limit of morality and tolerance of the other people. Looking into how the *bissu* manage their outlook and movement, you suddenly realize how significance the body is as a moral site.

The *bissu* as a trope of outlook and movement of the body contains many elements that we often forget that they are real individuals, who are born in 60 years ago, 40 years ago, 20 years ago, even 9 years ago, who struggle to live their life, crawl up from poverty and illiteracy. They might look ancient, and their movements might be queer, but they do not live in the past. They realize their appearance and movement are the ways they interact with the other people.

Identity is constructed within a particular context of interaction. The young *bissu* look traditional during rituals and performances, but look modern and cosmopolitan when they wait for their customers in their salons; an old *bissu* looks like a figure from an ancient community on televisions, films, stages, theaters, tourist brochures, covers of books, in their regalia house, and during rituals, but they look like an ordinary man in their humble small hut in the middle of fishpond, a week after a big flood. Ironically, it is my turn to be surprised when I meet them and realize how marginal everyday life in our academic narratives is.

We live in many identities, and every identity we perform, we create a community, and we write our stories. My stories might be different, for they are the stories of many lives of the *bissu*. I find the *bissu*'s life on films, televisions, books, and theaters are coherent with their monolithic identity, banal yet transformative. They are the stories of a traditional community who struggle to sustain their tradition in the expansion of Islam, modernity, and capitalism. The traditions we write in our stories under their names look stiff, uncompromising, and black and white. Their life is of sacrifice, suffering, and violence. I do not say that the life is fake, but I argue that this is the life in its ideal form, the ethical life the *bissu* employs to reorient their life when their life goes to a wrong direction. This is the life where a tradition serves as a moral imperative: a beautiful life that bonds the *bissu* with their spirits. Yet, on the other side, this is

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<sup>238</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

the life that is often criticized for its artificiality and commoditization. Those who propagate this argument might have in their mind their own ideal life that they expect the *bissu* must possess.

Why do the *bissu*'s performances lead to this kind of debate, morality and ideal life? Many answers can be provided, but what is obvious our answer is related to the events we see on stages and screens: ritual events. And, we share a similar view that rituals are not ordinary but extraordinary - liminal - events. *Ma'giri*, *massureq*, *mappalili*, and *tola' bala* are performed when everyday life becomes unbearable: flood, drought, poverty, plague, famine, and death. *Temmu taung* and *cenning-cenning ati* are performed to sustain life and happiness. We will miss the spirits that the *bissu* bring on stages, on our television screens, when we see for the pleasure of our eyes, not the vibration of our soul. The rituals are performed to transform everyday life, the reality. Everyday life is the life that is full of struggle, compromises, and excitements. This is the life where we cannot judge. It is not coherent, and there is no a single plot to narrate the life. It can go to an unpredicted direction. But, it should be noted that the everyday life, the worldly life, has been ousted from Heaven since the First Man ascends to earth, and rituals are performed to bring it back to its place. It is a lonely place to live, as the First Man tells the *bissu*, and we need the *bissu* as He needs the *bissu* to perform, to entertain us, to seduce us, and to transform us, to make the life on earth bearable and to give hope for the future, for Heaven.

We bring many scholars and theories in our discussion on *bissu*. What we learn from the *bissu* is that identity is expressed through moral language, through the embodiment of ideal self, and the living of ethical life. It sounds Hegelian, but nothing wrong with it, for reality that we create is often based on the imagination, and we never leave the ordinary life laid bare in front of us; there is always a moment of touch that changes the way we see and experience life. This is the notion of tradition as a moral imperative that I attempt to convince you to embrace when we discuss the *bissu*.

Our notion of tradition can be misleading when we employ it to analyze a practice, not a community. Tradition is, as I argue above, is used as a moral imperative, a set of moral mechanism that traditional communities have to perform to change social realities: inequality, injustice, oppression, and violence. Our debate should focus on what kinds of (new) life - transformation - that the communities create through their performances of tradition.

The terms we come up in our discussion such as performance, performativity, subjectivity, identity, spectacle, and estrangement are the points where we start to discuss ethical life, to bring back humanity regardless of gender, religion, culture, and tradition we live in. They emerge from a simple question that many queer theorists have asked: Why do people get killed because the way they look and the way they move? Performance or performativity among queer theorists is a moral trope to argue against the reality and normality of heterosexuality, the moral underpinning of heterosexual institutions and individuals that rationalizes violence against those they consider deviant.

There is no ontological essence in performance or performativity. Foucault, Butler, and Fanon are among scholars that we learn that the body matters because it is a site of power and discourse.<sup>239</sup> And, we learn from Crenshaw and Collins that race is not an independent concept, it must be placed in its intersection with gender.<sup>240</sup> This operates in the same way to indigenous

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<sup>239</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (New York: Random House, 1978); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove press, 2008).

<sup>240</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, 1991, 1241-1299; Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The

communities and transgender people. What we attempt to expose in our discussions of the underprivileged people is not how they are different but how power works, how violence is moralized, and how an individual is dehumanized because they look different. In the West, with the violence against the people of color, race is a place to talk about why an individual is shot and brutally beaten because of the color of his or her skin; in the Middle-East, gender serves as a talking point for the oppressions of women; and in Southeast Asia, tradition is an entry point to talk about marginality and oppression against the so-called traditional communities. And, in particular, homosexuality is used to assess how human rights and democracy are implemented in a country.

The *bissu* live in many lives. They intersect and serve as identities that the *bissu* select strategically in their social and economic interactions. Transgender priesthood is a trope of traditionality - indigeneity - that they employ, or they are represented, to project their cultural belonging to ancient traditions. *Basa Torilangi* is the language they speak during ritual that makes them belong to priests of the ancient Bugis community. They dress in costumes that are identified as the costumes of the ancient Bugis transgender priests. But, with these traditional symbolic elements, they do not live in the past, they live in the same time and in the same space we live where nothing is untouched by modernity. They earn their livings like we do as professional workers. Some of them are beauticians, wedding planner, cook, dancers, and not less among them are farmers. They have families to support. Most of them are transgender, but not less among them are men and women. It is inspiring to see how they resolve conflicts and poverty. They flow, interact, and take comfort for unpredictability. They live in paradox, as their life is suspended between life and death, between the earth and heaven, between the upperworld and the underworld, between ritual and social life, between tradition and modernity, between homosexuality and heterosexuality, between their ancestors and their Islamic faith.

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