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### Repositioning Buginese Women as Shamans: A Gender Communication Perspective in South Sulawesi

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the evolving role of gender within the Buginese community of South Sulawesi, focusing on shamans, known as sandro, who are integral to healing, spiritual guidance, and community rituals. Historically male-dominated, the role of sandro has been reshaped by recent societal changes that allow women to assume these traditionally male roles. Employing a gender communication framework, the research explores how gendered cultural narratives influence the acceptance, resistance, and adaptation of women as shamans, highlighting the interplay between traditional norms and contemporary gender discourse.*

*This study adopts a feminist perspective, utilizing a phenomenological approach and Standpoint Theory to examine the roles of male and female shamans in decision-making within the community. The findings reveal that women shamans increasingly take on leadership roles, shouldering significant spiritual and social responsibilities, while male shamans often occupy supportive positions. This shift indicates a transformation of traditional gender norms. However, the study also identifies resistance to the role of shamans, often rooted in religious beliefs that challenge the legitimacy of shamanic practices.*

*By examining gender dynamics within the Buginese shamanic tradition, the research enhances our understanding of the relationships between gender, culture, and spirituality. The findings underscore the need to address persistent gender biases to promote greater equality and inclusivity in spiritual practices and community life, emphasizing the importance of a gender-sensitive approach in cultural preservation and social progress.*

**Keywords:** gender inequality, shaman, Buginese community, Standpoint Theory, phenomenological.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every individual aspires to justice and equality in society (Dixit, 2020), free from discrimination or unequal relationships. Achieving this ideal requires starting from the smallest social unit—the family. From there, efforts can expand to larger and more comprehensive contexts, ultimately reaching the state or national level (Mustari, 2016: 127). This step-by-step approach underscores the fundamental role of the family in shaping attitudes and behaviors that promote equality and fairness(Suryawati et al., 2021).

To realize this vision, it is essential to explore local wisdom as a foundation for discovering wiser and more contextually relevant alternatives (Mustari, 2016: 127). Local wisdom, embedded in cultural traditions and values, can provide unique insights and solutions that resonate deeply within a specific community, ensuring sustainable and meaningful progress.

Women already speak the languages of a wife, mother, daughter, friend, subordinate and boss(Idrus et al., 2023). They should also become versatile in the linguistic styles of as many managerial roles as possible, as well as executive-type positions in the public arena. By doing so they will gain greater acceptance for leadership positions when the opportunity arises (Davidson, 2016). In the context of Buginese culture, traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, reflecting a clear division of labor between men and women. Women are primarily associated with household responsibilities and are seen as the custodians of the domestic sphere (Joas & Knöbl, 2009). They are referred to as *indo ana* (mothers), responsible for tasks such as pounding rice, preparing meals, cooking, and taking care of children. These duties symbolize their role in nurturing and sustaining the family unit (Pelras, 2006: 175),(Aziz, 2023).

On the other hand, men are predominantly (Mostafa Taha & Fahmy, 2023) identified with activities outside the home (Davidson, 2016). They are labeled as *sappalalengattuong* or breadwinners and serve as the family's backbone. Their responsibilities often involve professions such as farming, fishing, trading, and carpentry (Davidson, 2016). These roles highlight the traditional perception of men as providers and protectors in the Buginese family structure(Graham, 2007).

The culturally prescribed division of gender roles in societies like the Buginese community(Moen, A., & Liddle, 2021) has historically been a deeply ingrained practice, rooted in traditional values and norms that define the duties and responsibilities of men and women. This division reflects a broader cultural and social order that assigns women primarily domestic roles, while men traditionally take on public and economic responsibilities. In Buginese culture (Sulistyo, 2020), for example, women were historically seen as the custodians of the home, focused on tasks like child-rearing, cooking, and maintaining the household, while men were viewed as the providers and decision-makers in the public sphere. This pattern was underpinned by cultural values like **sipakatau** (mutual respect), **sipakainge** (reminding one another), and **sipakalebbi** (mutual appreciation), which emphasize respect, cooperation, and appreciation within the community, regardless of gender roles (Sulistyo, 2020).

However, with the evolving social, economic, and political landscapes, these traditional roles are increasingly being challenged. Social progress, including educational advancements, the rise of women's movements(Ernanda, 2023), and economic changes, has opened up new

spaces for women in public life. In many societies, including the Buginese community, women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere but are stepping into roles previously dominated by men. This shift is a response to the increasing recognition of gender equality and the need to create more inclusive societies.

This transformation is particularly significant because it reflects a broader, global trend of increasing female participation in leadership, politics, and the workforce. Women's involvement in economic activities, education, and politics has expanded worldwide, contributing to the reduction of traditional gender roles that limited women's mobility and opportunities. In many cultures, such shifts are being further supported by legal reforms and changing attitudes toward gender equality (Amartya, 1999; (Nussbaum, 2002).

Moreover, Buginese society's acceptance of women's expanded roles in public and spiritual spheres can be seen as a reflection of the broader shift in cultural attitudes toward gender equality. In this context, local wisdom helps bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, ensuring that cultural practices evolve in a way that supports progress while still honoring the past. This can be particularly important in promoting sustainable social change that resonates with the community's identity and values (Sulistyo, 2020).

However, the position of women in many indigenous societies, including Buginese culture, has evolved over time. Economic changes, educational access, and the increasing participation of women in the workforce and public life have led to a reevaluation of women's roles in society. Women's empowerment movements and legal reforms have also played significant roles in challenging traditional gender norms, promoting gender equality, and opening doors for women to take on leadership and decision-making positions previously dominated by men (Nussbaum, 2002) (Sen, 1999) (Sen, 1999).

The findings from the Alenangka Village study indicate a notable shift in the perception of women's status. Women in Alenangka are no longer passive participants in their families and communities but are increasingly assuming leadership roles. The traditional understanding of women as passive recipients of decisions made by men has been gradually replaced by a more active participation in decision-making processes, both in the family and within the larger community.

Buginese women in Alenangka, particularly those who identify as *malebbiq* (calm, gentle women), are using their nurturing qualities not only within the domestic sphere but also in roles traditionally reserved for men. This change is particularly evident in the practice of *sandro* or *shamans*, where women now play a critical role in guiding their communities. Historically, shamans were often male figures, entrusted with spiritual leadership and decision-making. However, the study found that women in Alenangka have increasingly become *sandro*, assuming responsibilities that extend beyond domesticity to include crucial community leadership roles such as determining auspicious times for planting, harvesting, and other significant activities.

Women in Alenangka are not just challenging traditional gender roles; they are doing so in a manner that respects and integrates local customs and traditions. In this sense, the community is undergoing a process of cultural adaptation, where gender equality is achieved through the reinterpretation of traditional roles rather than their complete abandonment. This approach reflects a broader trend in many indigenous societies, where the integration of local

wisdom into gender equality efforts can ensure that changes are culturally appropriate and sustainable (Sulistyo, 2020).

This repositioning is part of broader societal changes in Indonesia, where women's roles are evolving in response to shifts in education, economic participation, and political inclusion. In Buginese society, this change is not just a departure from tradition but also a cultural adaptation. Women in Alenangka Village, for example, have begun assuming leadership roles, particularly in their capacity as *sandro* (shamans), a position traditionally occupied by men. As *sandro*, women are seen as spiritual leaders, making important decisions regarding communal practices like planting crops or determining auspicious times for significant activities. These roles signify a recognition of women's inherent capabilities and their potential to lead in both spiritual and practical realms, aligning with the global movement towards gender equality and empowerment (Nussbaum, 2002) (Sen, 1999).

The study's findings reveal a society that is slowly but steadily acknowledging women as influential decision-makers, capable of guiding their families and communities. This shift in recognition of women's leadership aligns with a broader trend where, across various cultures, women are increasingly seen as central contributors to communal life. Such shifts in gender roles reflect the growing recognition of women's potential to lead, not just in domestic spheres but in public, cultural, and even spiritual dimensions (N, 2012).

In many indigenous societies, such as the Buginese, spiritual authority was once exclusively male. The role of *sandro* was seen as an expression of male power, but women's involvement in this role suggests that the gendered nature of spiritual leadership is being redefined. This shift can be understood through the lens of **gender performativity**, as described by Judith Butler (1990), who argued that gender roles are not inherent but are socially constructed through repeated performances (Butler, 1990). As women begin to perform roles once restricted to men, they challenge the very norms that dictate what is considered "appropriate" for their gender. This reshaping of gender norms in Buginese society highlights the fluidity of gender roles and the ways in which individuals can challenge and redefine societal expectations (Butler, 1990); (R, 2005).

The evolution of gender roles within the Buginese community is a fascinating reflection of broader societal trends. In many cultures, traditional gender roles have been strictly defined, with men often assuming leadership positions in the public domain, while women were relegated to domestic and supportive roles. In South Sulawesi, however, the concept of the *sandro* (shaman) provides a compelling example of how these roles were more fluid than initially thought. Historically, women in Buginese society, through their roles as shamans, held considerable social and spiritual authority, influencing decisions that were crucial to the well-being of their communities. This cultural complexity highlights the nuanced relationship between gender, authority, and community dynamics (M.A, 2008).

As societal values evolve, so too do the roles that men and women occupy. In many contexts, particularly in **gender communication studies**, these evolving roles reveal the intersection of culture, power, and identity. Research on gender communication emphasizes how societal norms are not static, but instead, they change in response to cultural shifts and modernization (J, 2005). In Buginese culture, as women's roles in spiritual and communal leadership expand, we see a direct reflection of these broader societal shifts, which challenge traditional gendered expectations and open up new possibilities for women's participation in decision-making processes (Littlejohn & Foss, 2016) (Foss, 2008).

Moreover, **gender bias** remains a significant issue globally, including in communities like the Buginese. Women, even as shamans, have historically faced challenges to their authority and leadership, often stemming from ingrained cultural biases and religious beliefs (R, 2005). Despite this, the ongoing adaptation of gender roles, especially in the realm of spiritual and community leadership, offers a critical insight into the flexibility and resilience of cultural traditions (Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, 2004). Women's increasing involvement in decision-making processes is a sign of both cultural resistance and adaptation to modern ideals of gender equality (N, 2012).

The **study of gender equality** in decision-making processes is vital in addressing the systemic inequalities that arise from culturally constructed roles (Sen, 1999). By examining the contributions of women, especially as *sandro*, we gain insight into how gender roles are negotiated, not only in the public sphere but also within the private, domestic domain (Tannen, 1990). This research adds to the growing body of work that investigates the role of women in leadership, offering specific insights into how these roles evolve within particular cultural contexts. Understanding this process is crucial for promoting a more inclusive and equitable society, both in the Buginese context and in broader global discussions on gender equality (Nussbaum, 2000).

The repositioning of Buginese women as *sandro* signifies a blend of preserving local wisdom while adapting to modern social norms. Examining this phenomenon through a gender communication lens helps to document and analyze how cultural heritage evolves without losing its essence. The role of *sandro* as decision-makers and spiritual leaders offers a rich case study for understanding how traditional practices can coexist with contemporary values.

To substantiate the research focus, data on gender roles in Buginese culture and societal perceptions can be used.

Table 1: Gender Roles and Responsibilities in Buginese Culture

Domain	Traditional Role of Men	Traditional Role of Women	Evolving Role of Women as <i>Sandro</i>
<b>Household</b>	Breadwinners, decision-makers	Caregivers, homemakers	Equal partners in decision-making
<b>Community</b>	Social and political leaders	Support roles	Decision-makers, spiritual guides
<b>Spirituality</b>	Rare involvement	Spiritual leaders ( <i>sandro</i> )	Recognized public figures influencing policy
<b>Agriculture and Economy</b>	Landowners, primary labor force	Supporting labor, managing household crops	Advising on auspicious planting and harvesting

By focusing on the *sandro* as a case study, this research highlights a pathway for achieving gender equality that is respectful of cultural traditions, fostering a deeper understanding of how gender communication can adapt in diverse contexts.

The research sheds light on the unique and historically significant role of *sandro* women as spiritual and social leaders. Their contemporary repositioning into broader leadership roles symbolizes a blending of tradition and modernity, an area that has been underexplored in previous studies.

The study situates its analysis within the broader framework of gender communication(Davidson, 2016), offering insights into how cultural modernization impacts the negotiation of gender roles. It examines both resistance and adaptability within traditional frameworks, contributing to the discourse on cultural and gender studies.

This focus on the interplay between tradition, modernization, and gender roles makes the study not only contextually relevant to South Sulawesi but also valuable for broader applications in understanding gender dynamics within diverse cultural settings.

The study conducted between September 1 and 7, 2023, in Alenangka Village, South Sinjai District, Sinjai Regency, offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolving perceptions of women's roles in Buginese society, specifically in the context of Alenangka Village. The concept of "repositioning" was used to describe the shift in how women are viewed in this community, especially with regard to their social and leadership roles. This change is a clear departure from traditional gender norms, where Buginese men were historically seen as the heads of households, protectors, and the primary agents responsible for establishing social connections within the community (Sulistyo, 2020).

## **2. Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, which is particularly effective in capturing and explaining complex social phenomena in a detailed, nuanced manner. The qualitative approach is fundamentally concerned with understanding how and why certain social processes and roles develop, rather than simply measuring them through numbers or statistical analysis (Bugin, 2007). This approach is especially valuable in exploring the cultural and societal changes that occur in communities, as it allows the researcher to delve deeply into the subjective experiences, meanings, and perspectives of the participants.

In this study, the focus is on the repositioning of Buginese women who take on the role of *sandro* (shamans), a position traditionally associated with spiritual and cultural authority in the community. Historically, this role has been gendered, with men typically occupying leadership positions, while women were confined to domestic and supportive roles. However, as societal and cultural dynamics evolve, women in Buginese communities are increasingly taking on leadership roles, including those of *sandro*. By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher can gain insights into how these shifts in gender roles are perceived within the local cultural context.

The qualitative descriptive approach is particularly valuable in capturing the richness of human experience, offering an in-depth understanding of the subjective meanings individuals attach to their roles(Marshall, C., & Rossman, 2016). In this case, it allows for an exploration of how Buginese women's roles as shamans are not only repositioned but also how these changes affect their relationships with others in the community. This method provides an opportunity to explore cultural perceptions, gender dynamics, and spiritual authority, as well as the resistance and acceptance of these evolving roles(Creswell, 2014) (Marshall, C., & Rossman, 2016).

The use of a qualitative descriptive(Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, 2011) design enables the researcher to gather rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences, which may not be captured through other methods. This approach involves various techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, which provide the researcher with a

deeper understanding of the evolving role of women in the Buginese community, particularly as they transition from traditional roles to those of leadership and authority. These methods allow for the exploration of cultural shifts and the way in which community members respond to and interpret the growing presence of women in spiritual and decision-making positions.

Moreover, a qualitative approach provides the flexibility to explore the complexities of gender relations, cultural identity, and social norms, all of which are crucial to understanding the evolving role of women as shamans. This approach allows the researcher to explore the intersection of gender, culture, and power, offering insights into how traditional roles are both challenged and reaffirmed within the context of modernization (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, 2011).

The primary method of data collection for this study is through interviews, which is a typical approach in qualitative research, especially when seeking to understand the lived experiences of individuals (Silverman, 2013). By interviewing informants—specifically those in positions to provide insight into the cultural, social, and gender dynamics within the Buginese community—the researcher is able to directly capture valuable information. These interviews are designed to gather personal narratives, perspectives, and experiences related to the changing role of women as shamans, providing the research with rich, first-hand data. The gender communication (Enaifoghe, 2023) approach is particularly useful in this context as it helps to examine how gender norms, roles, and communication practices shape and are shaped by women's involvement in the shamanic role.

The choice of research location is also critical for the study. The research is situated in Anni'e hamlet, Alenangka Village, located in South Sinjai District of Sinjai Regency. The researcher has chosen this location based on a proportional sampling technique, ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the specific social dynamics and cultural context of the community under study. By focusing on this particular village, the researcher is able to gain a more detailed understanding of the local culture, including the gender roles and the societal acceptance or resistance to women assuming roles that have traditionally been reserved for men, such as that of the shaman.

In this research, the selection of informants plays a critical role in ensuring that the data collected provides meaningful insights into the evolving roles of women as shamans (*sandro*) within the Buginese community. The chosen informants, twenty two in total, include both shamans and community leaders from Alenangka Village in the South Sinjai District, Sinjai Regency. These individuals were selected based on their direct involvement in the practices and rituals of shamanism, as well as their leadership positions within the community. This selection provides a multifaceted perspective on the shifting dynamics of gender roles, especially in relation to women's leadership positions. By engaging with these informants, the research can delve deeper into the lived experiences and societal perceptions of women in roles traditionally dominated by men, such as those of spiritual and community leaders. The informants' direct involvement allows the researcher to explore the nuances of how these roles have evolved and been integrated into contemporary cultural contexts, shedding light on the intersection of gender, spirituality, and leadership.

**Table 1. Demographic Data of Informants**

No	Age	Amount	Percentage
1	<20	4	18.18%
2	21-30	6	27.27%
3	>30	12	54.55%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

This breakdown allows the researcher to understand the demographic distribution of informants based on age. With 4 informants under 20 years old (18.18%), 6 between 21-30 years old (27.27%), and 12 informants over 30 years old (54.55%), the study captures a broad spectrum of perspectives. The inclusion of diverse age groups helps ensure that generational factors and life stages influence how gender roles, particularly in spiritual and leadership contexts, are perceived and navigated within the Buginese community. This can also offer valuable insights into how the role of women as shamans has evolved over time, with older generations possibly reflecting more traditional views, while younger generations may exhibit differing perspectives based on contemporary social influences.

In this research, the selection of informants plays a critical role in ensuring that the data collected provides meaningful insights into the evolving roles of women as shamans (*sandro*) within the Buginese community. The chosen informants, six in total, include both shamans and community leaders from Alenangka Village in the South Sinjai District, Sinjai Regency. These individuals were selected based on their direct involvement in the practices and rituals of shamanism, as well as their leadership positions within the community. This selection provides a multifaceted perspective on the shifting dynamics of gender roles, especially in relation to women's leadership positions. By engaging with these informants, the research can delve deeper into the lived experiences and societal perceptions of women in roles traditionally dominated by men, such as those of spiritual and community leaders. The informants' direct involvement allows the researcher to explore the nuances of how these roles have evolved and been integrated into contemporary cultural contexts, shedding light on the intersection of gender, spirituality, and leadership. real-world observations.

The research also involves a comprehensive data analysis process, including transcribing interviews, processing observational data, reviewing documentation, and conducting a literature review. By triangulating data from different sources, the study enhances the validity of the findings, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are supported by multiple forms of evidence. This approach aligns with the views of (Denzin, 2012), who advocates for data triangulation to provide a more holistic view of the research problem.

The primary data sources consist of direct interviews with Buginese women who serve as shamans and community leaders, while secondary data includes literature and previous studies on gender roles, shamanism, and Buginese culture. Secondary data helps situate the findings within a broader academic and sociocultural context, enriching the understanding of the historical and cultural factors that have shaped gender dynamics in the region (Sukarena, 2007).

The qualitative descriptive approach, combined with a focus on primary and secondary data, allows the researcher to examine the shifting roles of Buginese women within the context of cultural modernization. This study aims to contribute to broader discussions of gender communication and cultural transformation, highlighting how traditional roles are being adapted in response to changing societal norms. It also offers valuable insights into the evolving roles of women as shamanic leaders in the Buginese community, illustrating a progressive shift towards greater gender equality.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Gender inequality is deeply rooted in societal norms and structures that have traditionally divided roles between men and women, often in ways that reinforce patriarchal values(Idrus et al., 2023). These roles are not only prevalent in the public sphere but also manifest strongly in the domestic sphere. The domestic sector, where women are predominantly seen as caretakers and homemakers, and the public sector, where men are often perceived as the primary breadwinners and leaders, create a rigid gender divide. This division, however, is not universal, and various cultures offer examples of gender fluidity, where roles are flexible and changeable(Kurniawan, 2021).

In many traditional societies(Wolf, 1992), particularly those influenced by patriarchal systems, gender roles are strictly defined. Such roles have been naturalized over time, becoming so embedded in the cultural fabric that they are often taken for granted. These norms can affect every aspect of life, from the division of labor to political power dynamics. However, when it comes to more dynamic (Moen, A., & Liddle, 2021), such as those associated with spiritual leadership, a shift can be observed. The role of the shaman, traditionally a position held by men in many societies, may challenge these gender norms, as women are also seen to possess the same spiritual gifts. This breaks down the clear-cut division of labor, demonstrating that spiritual authority is not necessarily bound by gender(Ernanda, 2023).

The evolution of the role of women as shamans, or “*sandro*” in the Buginese context, is an important case study in this respect. Historically, shamanism was a male-dominated field in many cultures, but over time, women in the Buginese community began to occupy this powerful role, breaking gender norms associated with spiritual leadership. In fact, some contemporary views in the Buginese society suggest that the power of a shaman is not dictated by gender but rather by the gifts bestowed upon the individual by the creator, regardless of their sex. This shift challenges the traditional stigma that men are inherently suited for leadership and spiritual roles, showing that leadership, authority, and strength can transcend gender.

Research on the repositioning of women in roles traditionally held by men(Karimullah & Aliyah, 2023), especially in spiritual and cultural contexts, reveals that the evolving role of women in the Buginese community is reshaping societal perceptions of gender roles. The perception that men and women can both hold spiritual authority is indicative of a broader cultural shift. This process reflects a gradual transformation of societal structures, where gender is seen as more fluid and less confined to the binary system that has historically governed much of the world’s cultures.

As modernity continues to influence cultural practices, the role of women as shamans in the Buginese society offers a unique example of how gender norms can be reshaped. According to research by (Dube, 2020), the intersection of gender and spirituality can create spaces where traditional roles are redefined. In societies where women were once excluded from certain powerful roles, their inclusion not only challenges gender norms but also provides new ways of understanding the intersection of culture, power, and gender identity.

Similarly, according to (Moen, A., & Liddle, 2021) gender roles in many non-Western societies, including in Southeast Asia, are being renegotiated in response to modern influences. In communities like the Buginese, these shifts are often facilitated by women who, through their involvement in traditional spiritual practices, carve out new spaces for themselves within the power structures of their culture. This process often involves a redefinition of what it means to be a leader, a healer, and a spiritual guide, with less emphasis on gender and more on individual capabilities and spiritual connection.

The changing perceptions of gender roles in the Buginese community, particularly with respect to the shamanic role, also highlight the resilience and adaptability of cultural practices. As society becomes more aware of gender inequalities and the limitations of traditional gender norms, there is greater potential for breaking down these barriers and creating more inclusive spaces where both men and women can thrive in leadership roles, including those historically dominated by one gender. In doing so, this evolution demonstrates the potential for traditional communities to adapt to changing social values while preserving (Rezaei, 2022).

In sum, the shift in how the Buginese community views the role of women as shamans represents a broader trend in gender transformation, where societal roles, particularly in the spiritual and leadership domains, are being redefined. This transformation is not just about women gaining access to previously male-dominated roles but also about breaking down the traditional barriers that have perpetuated gender inequality in many parts of the world.

In many societies, the division of labor based on gender has historically followed strict roles, particularly in patriarchal systems. Traditionally, the role of men, particularly husbands, has been associated with the public sphere(Kanes et al., 2019)—providing for the family, engaging in work outside the home, and making decisions that influence the community at large. Conversely, women, particularly wives, have been tasked with managing domestic duties, including taking care of children(Idrus et al., 2023), managing the household, and ensuring the family's day-to-day needs are met. This division has been ingrained in cultural norms and practices, often viewed as a natural or inevitable state. These roles, while seemingly practical, have reinforced gender inequalities, leaving women with limited autonomy outside the home(Karimullah & Aliyah, 2023).

However, over time, women in some societies have resisted these limitations and expanded their roles into areas traditionally dominated by men, often as a way to assert their identity and break free from the constraints imposed by patriarchal structures(Nurahmawati, 2024). In communities where spiritual or leadership roles have been predominantly male, women have found ways to occupy these positions, challenging the traditional gendered division of labor(Eleanora & Supriyanto, 2020). One such example can be seen in the Buginese community, where women have gradually assumed the role of shamans (referred to as *sandro*), a position once exclusively held by men.

This shift in gender roles, particularly in spiritual practices, speaks to the broader ways in which patriarchal norms can be questioned and redefined. In the Buginese context, the role of the shaman is crucial because it involves both spiritual and community leadership. Shamans are responsible for guiding their community in rituals, offering spiritual guidance, and sometimes acting as healers. While such roles were traditionally male-dominated(Aziz, 2023), there has been a significant change in this practice, with women now taking on these roles in parallel with men. This indicates a larger transformation in how gender is perceived in spiritual contexts(McLuhan, 2019).

The case of Hawisa (54 years old) and her husband Atong (57 years old) highlights this transformation. Despite the patriarchal backdrop of their community, their household operates in a way that challenges traditional gender roles. According to their account, Hawisa plays a central role in decision-making, both in the domestic and public realms. Her ability to make decisions that affect not only her family but also the wider community—such as determining

the appropriate times to plant or harvest crops, or deciding on key events like weddings—reflects her spiritual and social leadership. This shift in power dynamics within their marriage shows a blurring of the lines traditionally drawn between male and female roles, particularly in relation to leadership and spiritual guidance(Graham, 2007).

Research has shown that such changes in gender roles(Aziz, 2023) within the household and community are not uncommon in contexts where women challenge patriarchal structures(Eleanora & Supriyanto, 2020). A study by (McLuhan, 2019) explores the rise of female leaders in traditionally male-dominated spheres, highlighting that women who break into such roles often bring unique strengths, such as a deeper connection to the community and a more nuanced understanding of social and spiritual dynamics. This is evident in the case of Hawisa, who, due to her deep knowledge of agricultural cycles and community rituals, has taken on the role of decision-maker in her household and community.

Moreover, the concept of shared decision-making, as seen in the partnership between Hawisa and Atong, underscores the evolving nature of gender roles within the Buginese community. Rather than a top-down approach where men hold all authority, there is a collaborative element to decision-making in this family, with Hawisa's insights and knowledge being highly valued. This collaborative model reflects a more egalitarian view of gender roles, where both partners contribute equally to the functioning of their household and the community.

Through interview, Hawisa said that the talent of being shaman acquired when his first child was born in 40 years ago. According to her, this talent or strength was inherited by *indo* (a kind of place to ask and request strength from him) after reciting prayers through prayer movements and reciting the Qur'an (Hawisa, Shaman, interview, 02/02/2023). Of course, the ability as shaman like that owned by Mrs. Havisa, cannot be imitated and carried out by just anyone because it can only be obtained by certain people who have been willed by Allah swt.

Mrs. Havisa's statement above was also corrected by her husband, Antong, who said that: "*Many people usually come to the house from various regions, including from outside South Sulawesi, such as Java and Kalimantan to ask about when to carry out the marriage contract, wedding party and etc. Apart from that, people who came to the house were not only the village head, but also the deputy regent to ask for instructions*" (Atong, Hawisa's husband, interview, 02/02/2023).

According to Atong, what Havisa had done, his wife, spending more time outside the house with other people as shaman, was normal and there was no problem between the two of them. This is in accordance with his statement: "*This is normal in our house, because with her strength, she can actually help other people. So, I can't forbid her. Such things must be supported because not everyone wants to help other people*" (Atong, Hawisa's husband, interview, 02/04/2023).



Figure 1: A *Sandro* woman at the opening of a traditional ceremony.

(Source: Researcher's Data)

Another shaman is Lina (34 years old), who said that the strength she gained came from dreams. He had the dream before dawn when his uncle died after several months. While his uncle was still alive, he never asked for it, and never inherited to other people, even when asked. With the strength she has gained, Mrs. Lina can treat sick people who have suffered from strokes, difficulty speaking since childhood, paralysis and diseases commonly experienced by many young children, such as steps, stomach ailments and so on. Regarding decision making, Lina said that she did not have the capacity to do that. However, she explained that her role in the household together with her husband was to support each other and run smoothly. When she wanted to go for treatment, her husband took her to the sick person's house because he could not drive a motorcycle. This was done because many people were seriously ill and could no longer be brought to my house for treatment. So, the only way, I have to go to their house to treat them (Lina, shaman, interview 23/02/2023).

When a wife as shaman spends more time outside the house, sometimes family harmony is disturbed because internal affairs of the household have to be taken over by the husband. For example, the work of cooking, washing, cleaning the house and other matters, are taken by a hasband. With regard to the attitude towards a woman as shaman who makes decisions about certain matters which are in the public domain, society views that women are born and raised naturally to do everything related to the kitchen, bedroom, well and so on as a domestic area (Đorđević, 2022). Meanwhile, society views that men are born to do everything related to public areas outside the house, such as planting rice, fishing, selling merchandise, maintaining gardens and so on.

The result of research conducted in Anni'e Hamlet, Alenangka Village, South Sinjai District, Sinjai Regency found that some communities reject the shaman profession, whether played by a woman or a man. However, some societies consider that the role of shaman is very necessary in decision making regarding the goodness and badness of an activity to be carried out. The two different views of society mentioned above are caused by two factors, namely the factors of religion and belief or spiritual strength.

### **3. 1. Repositioning Buginese Women as Shamans: Gender Communication and Religious Influences in South Sulawesi**

The findings regarding the role of religious beliefs in shaping perceptions of shamans can be effectively examined using **Standpoint Theory**, particularly in how individuals' perspectives and knowledge are influenced by their social positions and experiences. Standpoint Theory posits that knowledge is socially situated, and that those in marginalized or less powerful positions often have a unique perspective on social realities. (Harding, 2004). This theory suggests that a person's experiences, shaped by their gender, race, religion, or other social factors, will influence how they view and interpret social roles, such as that of a shaman. In the context of Dina's statement, her rejection of the shaman's advice due to her strong Islamic beliefs is shaped by her religious upbringing, which emphasizes faith in Allah as the sole source of power and guidance. Dina's standpoint as a devout Muslim woman with a family rooted in religious leadership directly informs her rejection of shamanic authority, highlighting how religious socialization influences the individual's worldview.

Religious factors are significant in many societies, particularly in Islamic contexts, where the belief in the omnipotence of Allah often leads to skepticism towards alternative spiritual practices like shamanism. As Dina mentioned, her refusal to seek the shaman's help for decision-making or treatment is based on a belief that only Allah has the ultimate power to heal and guide decisions. This view aligns with **Standpoint Theory**, which would argue that Dina's religious and cultural standpoint shapes her perception of what constitutes legitimate sources of knowledge and authority. Her personal experiences and religious teachings place her in opposition to shamanic practices, seeing them as incompatible with her understanding of Islamic faith. This rejection is not just a personal preference, but a reflection of the larger social and religious norms of the community, which view reliance on shamans as a challenge to the all-encompassing power of Allah.

In contrast, individuals who practice shamanism, such as the shamans in the previous findings, may have a different standpoint based on their experiences and beliefs. Their perspective is shaped by the spiritual power they hold, which is considered a gift from Allah in their worldview. The position of the shaman, particularly within the Buginese community, provides them with a unique standpoint that allows them to access knowledge and authority that differs from that of those who adhere strictly to Islamic teachings. The spiritual power bestowed upon shamans through dreams or other divine experiences positions them as legitimate figures of authority within the community, a role that is contested by those like Dina who follow a more orthodox religious path.

This clash between religious and spiritual worldviews reflects the broader tension between traditional beliefs and modern religious practices. The fact that Dina, as a religious leader's daughter and a devout follower of Islam, rejects the shaman's influence in decision-making or healing, demonstrates the way in which societal power structures (such as religious authority) dictate what is considered legitimate knowledge. On the other hand, the shamans, whose power and wisdom are recognized by some members of the community, represent an alternative source of knowledge and authority that contrasts with the dominant religious standpoint.

In conclusion, examining the findings through the lens of **Standpoint Theory** (Arake et al., 2023) helps to clarify how religious beliefs and social positions shape the perspectives of individuals toward practices like shamanism. Dina's perspective as a devout Muslim and community leader provides insight into how dominant cultural and religious standpoints influence the rejection of alternative knowledge systems, such as those held by shamans. The theory also helps illuminate the broader power relations that govern knowledge production and the recognition of authority in societies where religion plays a central role (Smith, 2005).

### **3. 2. Repositioning Buginese Women as Shamans: The Influence of Gender Communication and Spiritual Beliefs in South Sulawesi**

The role of shamans in some societies, particularly in places where both Islamic beliefs and traditional spiritual practices coexist, is complex and rooted in a long history of cultural and religious negotiations. The perspectives shared by individuals like Ansar in Anni'e Hamlet provide a unique glimpse into the intersection of these belief systems. Ansar acknowledges the strength of genies and the spiritual power of shamans but simultaneously rejects full belief in them due to Islamic teachings that prohibit such practices. This duality is not uncommon in communities where Islam, as a dominant religion, coexists with indigenous spiritual practices, including shamanism.

Ansar's comment that "prayer is actually a suggestion" highlights a psychological aspect of belief, where faith in spiritual practices—whether through prayer, shamanic rituals, or healing—can have tangible effects. The idea that suggestion, combined with traditional medicine, can heal, especially when conventional medical treatment is unavailable or insufficient, aligns with studies in psychology and medical anthropology that explore the placebo effect and the power of belief in healing (Harris, J., & Glover, 2020). In many cultures, the act of being treated by a shaman or other spiritual healer creates a space where the sick person can believe in the possibility of healing, which itself can be a powerful tool in their recovery.

The shaman's role in society goes beyond just healing; it extends into decision-making and providing guidance for the community. This role is evident in the case of Mustamin, who determines the appropriate day for activities based on spiritual and environmental signs, such as the weather. This practice reflects the deep connection between spiritual beliefs and practical decision-making in many indigenous and rural societies. According to (Crick, 2021), shamans often serve as mediators between the spiritual and material worlds, using their knowledge of spiritual forces to guide individuals and communities in their daily lives, whether it's for healing or making decisions about important events.

Moreover, the fact that shamans in Anni'e Hamlet do not charge for their services—sometimes offering their help for free—reinforces the communal and altruistic nature of their role. This aspect of shamanism is common in many indigenous cultures where spiritual leaders are seen not as businesspeople but as custodians of spiritual knowledge and healing practices. This is consistent with the broader literature on the ethics of indigenous healing practices, where the focus is often on service to the community rather than profit (Ong, 2020).

The tension between Islamic beliefs and shamanic practices, as articulated by Ansar, is an ongoing issue in many parts of the world where traditional beliefs continue to clash with monotheistic religions. Islamic teachings emphasize the belief in one God (Allah) and discourage seeking help from any source other than Allah for guidance and healing. This prohibition is rooted in the Islamic concept of "tawhid," the oneness of God, and the idea that

belief in jinn or other spiritual entities could be considered a form of shirk (associating others with God) (El-Zein, 2002).

However, despite the doctrinal opposition to shamanism, the continued practice of shamanistic rituals in these communities highlights a certain level of syncretism. In many cases, individuals and communities continue to incorporate shamanic practices into their lives, often adapting them in ways that do not directly contradict their religious beliefs. This phenomenon, called “religious syncretism,” is well-documented in anthropological studies, showing how indigenous spiritual practices can coexist with or even be adapted into major world religions like Islam (Khan, 2023).

The findings from Ansar and Mustamin's perspectives illustrate how the role of shamans in decision-making and healing is shaped by a combination of spiritual beliefs, psychological factors, and social dynamics. The tension between Islamic teachings and traditional shamanistic practices in Anni'e Hamlet serves as a microcosm of broader global debates about the coexistence of religious and indigenous spiritual practices. Understanding this interplay requires an appreciation of the complex ways in which belief systems, cultural traditions, and individual experiences shape the practices and perceptions of authority figures like shamans. These findings underscore the importance of examining how religious beliefs and traditional knowledge systems intersect and influence social practices, particularly in communities that continue to navigate the legacy of colonialism, globalization, and religious modernization.

The research findings on the role of shamans in Anni'e Hamlet, Alenangka Village, reveal an intricate intersection of religious beliefs, traditional spiritual practices, and social dynamics. By analyzing the statements of key informants, including Ansar, Mustamin, and others, this study illuminates how community members perceive and navigate the complex relationship between Islamic teachings and traditional shamanic practices.

One of the most striking findings is the dual nature of belief regarding the role of shamans. On one hand, individuals like Ansar express skepticism toward shamanic practices, emphasizing their faith in Allah and rejecting the legitimacy of shamans. However, at the same time, they acknowledge the effectiveness of spiritual suggestions and traditional healing, suggesting a nuanced understanding of belief. On the other hand, Mustamin's ability to determine the “right day” for activities based on spiritual insights demonstrates the broad scope of the shaman's role in everyday decision-making. This practice of using spiritual signs to determine auspicious times is a common feature in many indigenous cultures and serves as an example of how spiritual knowledge is used to guide social practices. According to (Crick, 2021), such decision-making is integral to the shaman's position within the community, positioning them as mediators between the material and spiritual worlds. These practices, while rooted in spiritual beliefs, help provide structure and meaning in daily life.

The tension between Islamic beliefs and traditional shamanic practices is evident in Ansar's statement that a Muslim is prohibited from fully believing in shamans. This aligns with the theological position in Islam that places emphasis on the oneness of God (tawhid) and prohibits the seeking of spiritual guidance from sources other than Allah, such as jinn or shamans (El-Zein, 2002). However, as shown in the findings, this rejection is not absolute. The acknowledgment of spiritual power, such as that attributed to genies or spirits, within a broader religious framework reflects a form of religious syncretism, where Islamic beliefs coexist with traditional practices, albeit in a modified form. This mirrors the findings of (Khan, 2023) who explored the coexistence of Islamic teachings with indigenous practices, noting that such syncretism is often the result of historical, cultural, and social processes that shape individuals' beliefs and practices.

Moreover, the role of religious leaders like Dina, who are positioned in opposition to shamanic practices, highlights how power dynamics within religious institutions can influence the rejection of traditional practices. Dina's position as a community leader reinforces her adherence to Islamic beliefs, further marginalizing shamanic practices. This dynamic reflects the broader influence of religious and political authority in shaping what is considered legitimate knowledge and practice within a community (P.R, 2011).

The altruistic nature of shamanic practice, where shamans often provide healing without charging for their services, is another key finding. This is consistent with the ethical framework of many indigenous healing practices, where the healer is seen not as a businessperson but as a custodian of spiritual knowledge, offering help to the community without expectation of financial gain. This aspect of shamanism has been discussed in various studies on indigenous healing ethics, which emphasize community service over profit (Ong, 2020). It also reflects the communal values of the Anni'e Hamlet, where shamans are viewed not only as spiritual leaders but as elders who provide wisdom and support to those in need.

In comparison with past studies, this research aligns with the works of (Crick, 2021) and (Harris, J., & Glover, 2020) in emphasizing the psychological and cultural dimensions of shamanic healing. Like these studies, this research highlights how belief in the efficacy of shamanic practices is deeply intertwined with cultural and religious frameworks. However, this study also contributes to the literature by specifically focusing on the intersection of Islam and shamanism in a rural Indonesian context, an area that has received limited attention in recent research. While previous studies have addressed the coexistence of Islamic and indigenous practices in various parts of the world (Khan, 2023), this study adds nuance by showing how religious teachings can simultaneously reject and integrate certain traditional practices, depending on the individual's position within the community.

One limitation of this study is the reliance on a small sample size from a specific community, which may not fully represent the diversity of beliefs and practices within broader Indonesian society. The findings may not be generalizable to other regions where Islam and traditional spiritual practices coexist, as local cultural differences can significantly impact how these practices are perceived and enacted. Additionally, the study's focus on interviews may introduce biases based on individual interpretations and subjective experiences. Future research could benefit from incorporating more diverse data sources, such as ethnographic observations or quantitative surveys, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has explored the complex role of shamans in Anni'e Hamlet, Alenangka Village, and how their practices are intertwined with religious beliefs, social power dynamics, and community norms. The findings highlight the coexistence of Islamic teachings and traditional spiritual practices, showing that individuals and communities navigate these tensions in various ways. By situating this study within the framework of religious syncretism and the power of suggestion in healing, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how indigenous healing practices continue to play a vital role in the lives of people in rural Indonesian communities, despite the dominance of Islam. The research also demonstrates how power, authority, and belief systems intersect to shape knowledge production and legitimacy within the community.

In the research on the role of shamans in Anni'e Hamlet, Alenangka Village, where Islamic religious beliefs and traditional spiritual practices intersect, the absence of conflict of interest indicates that the study was conducted without the influence of external factors that

could affect the results or interpretation of the research. If this research involved funding or involvement from parties with personal or financial interests related to the research findings, such as organizations connected to traditional healing or religious institutions, it could affect the objectivity and credibility of the results obtained. For example, if a researcher has financial ties to an organization supporting shamanistic practices, this could influence how the research is conducted and the findings obtained.

However, if there is no involvement from parties with vested interests in this research, it can be ensured that the findings are more objective and free from biases caused by external factors. This is especially relevant in this study, where the dynamics of religion and traditional practices interact and are often influenced by social and religious authorities, which can shape the research outcomes. Therefore, the statement that there is no conflict of interest supports the claim that the analysis and findings of this study are presented in an honest way, without being influenced by external interests that could undermine its credibility. This is crucial in maintaining transparency and reliability in scientific research, which, in this case, contributes to enriching our understanding of religious syncretism and traditional healing practices in Indonesia.

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