Siri’, Gender, and Sexuality among the Bugis in South Sulawesi

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Abstrak


Key words: Siri’; gender; sexuality; the Buginese culture; social control.

Introduction

This paper examines Bugis notion of gender and sexuality in relation to siri’. I first discuss siri’ as a defining part of Bugis identity and how siri’ is manifested in gender-specific ways. Thus, I will explore how the cultural specificity of the Bugis notion of gender and sexuality is influenced by customary ideals derived from written traditions, as well as popular sayings and advice, and will draw upon a number of case studies, based on my fieldwork in Kulo (Sidrap) and Makassar. This paper aims to ex-
plain Bugis concepts of masculine and feminine in relation to *siri'* and sexuality as well as to explore gender in social encounter, in both private and public spaces. The paper contributes to the understanding of how customary law (Ind.: *adat*, Bug.: *ade')² and ethnic identity shape gender differences, and accordingly how men and women are treated differently in Bugis culture.

**Siri’, To Masiri’ and gender**

*Siri’* which may be defined as ‘shame’ or ‘honour’, has been discussed by a number of Bugis scholars³ as well as scholars from western countries.⁴ *Siri’* is central to the Bugis world view, and is regarded as the soul and the spirit of each individual in this society. Errington defines *siri*’ as dignity, honour or shame. She draws parallels with malu (Indonesian), *isin* (Javanese),⁵ *lek* (Balinese), and *hiya* (Tagalog). Similarly, Errington points out that ‘a person who has *siri’* is sensitive to, hence vulnerable to, other people’. She notes that *siri’* is unique to South Sulawesi, but various senses of the term are found throughout Southeast Asia (1989:145).⁶

² I have standardised the spelling of all Bugis terms I use in this paper. For example, to differentiate between *e* and *é*; I use *ia* instead of *iya*, *oa* instead of *owa*.
³ For example, Mattulada 1974 and 1995; Nyompa et.al. 1979; La Side 1977; Rahim 1982; Abdullah 1985; Abidin 1983; Marzuki 1995 and many others.
⁵ Keeler (1987:66) defines *isin* as ‘vulnerability to interaction’.
⁶ Three other indigenous ethnic groups (Makassarese, Torajanese and Mandarnese) in South Sulawesi also employ *siri’* as a fundamental principle, but its application varies slightly in degree and practice. See, for example, Chabot (1996) and Said (1984) for Makassarese; Lopa (1984) for Mandarnese; and Salombe (1984) for Torajanese.

For the Bugis, the concept of *siri’* is derived from *sumange’*(Bug.: energy of life), the life force of each individual in this society. Abdullah (1985:37) maintains that this concept is not only reflected in their behaviour, but also in their social system and way of thinking. This means that *siri’* is viewed as a fundamental element in Bugis cosmology, as their *jiwa* (Ind.: soul), *kehormatan* (honour) and *martabat* (prestige). The Bugis scholar, La Side (1977:25–28) suggests a variety of meanings for *siri’,* namely *malu-malu* (Ind.: shame), *seganherendahan-hati* (humility), *takut* (fear), *hiralath* (disgrace), *iri-hatidengki* (envy), *harga-diri* (self-respect), *kehormatan* (honour), and *kesusilaan* (morality).⁷ These meanings are parallel to Matthes’ definition in his Bugis-Dutch dictionary as *beschaamd* (ashamed), *schroomvallig* (timid), *verlegen* (shy), *schaamte* (shame), *eergevoel* (pride, sense of honour), *schande* (disgrace) and *wangunst* (envy) (Matthes 1874).

Ultimately, *siri’* is related to *onro* [Bug.: social status (Robinson 2001), social standing (Chabot 1996), social location (Millar 1983 and 1989), or social place (Errington 1989; Acciaioli 1989)]; one has to know one’s place in relation to others (nungse onrona). *Siri’* has special significance in Bugis society simply because one’s place in relation to others is always a matter of concern. Even if status (that is *onro*) is theoretically determined by birth, achieved status is as important as ascribed status to ascertain one’s social location (Robinson 2001:25), and it has to be continually demonstrated and acknowledged. Thus, a male family member will defend the *siri’* of a female relative because any attack on her *siri’* devalues or fails to acknowledge her social location or status.

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³ Errington (1983) discusses the term *sumange’* among the Bugis-Makassarese of South Sulawesi based on her fifteen month field work in Luwu.
⁴ See also Rahim (1982:109–110).
and by extension, that of her family and relations. This applies to husbands and affinal kin, just as much as to cognatic kin, since a marriage implies at least equal status between the sets of relations (Millar 1989).

Mattulada (1974; 1995) argues siri’ as an abstract term, but its concretely perceptible results may be experienced and observed. It has similarities with the notion of honour, described in Mediterranean culture, where honour is translated as “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society” (Pitt-Rivers 1965:21). One’s honour depends on the interpretation of one’s action by herself/herself from others (Robinson 1999:243), and is learned in the course of daily activities or through wise advise from elders.

When speaking of one’s ownsiri’, the concept indicates that one feels embarrassed about the situation. The consequence of siri’ may result in a fatal action, such as killing the person who makes one face siri’. Indeed, killing people because of siri’ is culturally acceptable for the Bugis. As Baroja states in relation to the Mediterranean concept of honour “the loss of honour is equated with the loss of life” (1965:85). This is because to kill someone in consideration of his/her wrong doing is also acceptable since death is regarded as more appropriate for him/her. This echoes the Bugis notion.

Siri’ in Bugis, like honour in the Mediterranean, can be used as a legitimation of violence. The cultural repercussions of defending siri’ for Bugis can only be understood if we relate it to other beliefs. For example, there is a saying in Bugis, cella’topi na doang (Bug.: when it becomes red, it proves it is a shrimp) which means any risk in defending siri’ is destiny (Bug.: wéré, Mak.: sarè). Life is nothing without dignity, and a person who does not have dignity is considered to be tennia ni’rupa tau (Bug.: a non-human being). As in Mediterranean society, honour is related to reputation and life, while dishonour is connected to infamy and death (Baroja 1965:85).

Since a family shares one siri’ (massé’di siri’), to masiri’ (Bug.: people who are being ashamed and who are responsible to defend family siri’) have to behave and an individual has to behave appropriately in a siri’ situation because they represent the family siri’, and people who are being shamed and who are responsible for defending family siri’ (to masiri’) have to act in response to transgressions by family members or others. Consequently, for the Bugis it is better to die defending siri’ (maté risiri’na) than to remain alive without dignity (maté siri’). For the Bugis, only for siri’ we are alive (Bug.: sirièmmi rionroang rilino). This proverb does not just carry the sense of social identity, but also self respect. One who has no siri’ (dé’gaga siri’na) is similar to a living corpse or an animal (Bug.: olo kolo’). Therefore, one should maintain her/his siri’ in order to continue to enjoy the respect of others.

But this is not to say that if one feels siri’, one automatically kills someone who causes siri’. Muhammad Sikki et al. (1998:49), for example, Abdullah (1985:39) cites a similar Makassar saying: ejatongpi na doang, explaining that a shrimp is grey before it is cooked, and becomes red after frying. Andaya (1979:369) expresses the outcome of defending siri’ among Makassarese: “as a shrimp is red (when cooked) and unbleached cotton is white, so must we accept what occurs, but we must first of all make an effort.”

10 Here family refers to whoever feels as a part of the family who is being shamed. In Bugis, a family does not solely involve sianang (Bug.: nuclear family), but may embrace extended family based on blood relation and passilesurengeng (Bug.: siblinghood, even without family or village of origin relation), or passari’battangang in Makassar term. This relatedness is called assiwolongpolongeng, and associates people to share one siri’ and differentiate between family and to laing, literally meaning other people, but carrying the sense of outsider.

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9 Abdallah (1985:39) cites a similar Makassar saying: ejatongpi na doang, explaining that a shrimp is grey before it is cooked, and becomes red after frying. Andaya (1979:369) expresses the outcome of defending siri’ among Makassarese: “as a shrimp is red (when cooked) and unbleached cotton is white, so must we accept what occurs, but we must first of all make an effort.”
ample, indicate three levels of siri’ on the basis of how people react. The first level of siri’ is that siri’ which can still be tolerated (Ind.: wajar jika didiamkan). For example, people look down on an adult man who has no job. Instead of responding to the humiliation in a negative way, he uses his siri’ as a challenge to find a job. The second level of siri’ is that siri’ which is supposed to be followed by anger (Ind.: reaksi marah). For instance, if someone steals someone else’s goods without feeling guilty, this sense of the thieves remorselessness should prompt an angry reaction in order to emphasise the perpetrator’s behaviour. Finally, there is the level of siri’ which has to be paid for with killing (dibayar dengan nyawa), as in an honour killing in response to, for example, incidents of elopement (Bug.: silariang, see Sahariah’s case below), or in cases of incest.11

There is a Bugis saying: “If one’s siri’ is offended, one would act without a word” (narékko siri’ na naranreng tenrirengina nariéwa) (Machmud 1976:60). This saying indicates the moral duty of someone whose siri’ is violated. In other words, siri’ has positive and negative applications (see Idrus and Bennett 2003:47–49). Siri’ as ‘honour’ may appear to be a positive motivator. For instance, because of siri’ someone attempts to motivate himself to achieve a standard of excellence, measured by material wealth, social status, level of education etc. In contrast, siri’ as ‘shame’ may force an individual to seek vengeance against the one who causes siri’. For example, in elopement (Bug.: silariang), the men as well as the women are in danger of being killed by the women’s male kin to maintain the siri’ of the family. However, in marriage by abduction (rilariang), only the man is in danger of being killed, while the woman is in no danger of punishment because she is taken against her will.

A man who dies in defending siri’ (maté risiri’na’) is considered to die in sugar and coconut milk (maté rigollai, maté risantangi), meaning he dies in a sweet and delicious death. This notion implies that he has undergone an honourable and responsible death for the sake of the family.12 For that reason, the solution to questions of siri’ may be accomplish through either taking the law into one’s own’s hand (Ind.: main hakim sendiri) or through a customary court (pengadilan adat) before the law. Since siri’ is a part of adat, there is a Bugis saying related to this: adat does not recognise children and grandchildren (Bug.: ade’ é temmakkéana’ temmakké eppo) (Abdullah 1985:20). The gist of this saying is that anybody who collides with adat has to be treated the same. Thus whoever causes siri’, she/he would be treated equally. Siri’ exists in every aspect of Bugis’ life, but the most common and concrete acts which can cause offence to siri’ are courtship and marriage (Mattulada 1995:62; Abdullah 1985:37).

Siri’ is significant for analysing gender relations in Bugis society (Robinson 2001:26, 1999:242–243; Millar 1989, 1983). Even though to masiri’ refers to male and female kin, in general men are described by the term. It is regarded as more appropriate if females’ feeling of siri’ is defended by their male kinsmen (Millar 1983:484) who are obliged to respond if siri’ is transgressed (Robinson 2001:27). While sons, particularly the eldest son, act as the first fortress of the family in the context of siri’, daughters are the ones who must be protected by

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11 Fajar (1999)—a local newspaper—reported the court hearings of an honour killing. A man killed his mother and his older brother because of their incestuous relationship, which he said both had admitted. Moreover, they allowed him to do whatever he pleased because they realised the shame (Fajar 1, 10 and 11 November 1999).

their siblings and other kinsmen in order to guard family siri' (Abdullah 1985:130–131). On this point, men’s control of female sexuality is sustained by the code of siri’ (Robinson 1999:243). Brawn—who conducted research in Bone (South Sulawesi)—argues that Bone women do not have siri’ because they cannot defend themselves from siri’ situations (1993:60). On this point, however, it is not that women have no siri.’ Rather, since women are the primary symbol of siri’, it is considered more honourable if they stay calm rather than defending their siri’ themselves. However, women also take the active role of to masiri’, as shown in the following example.

Sahariah: a female To Masiri’

I conducted an interview with a female prisoner (Sahariah) in Maros jail who had killed her niece’s sweetheart, Muhlis, because of siri.’ He had dated her niece, Nia, for months in a clandestine courtship. This relationship was forbidden because Muhlis had never made a formal proposal to her parents. On the day of the killing, someone told Sahariah that Nia and Muhlis were going to elope. She went looking for them on her way back from working in her rice fields in order to ask Nia to go home. Nia, however, refused to return home and Muhlis would not let Nia leave and even scolded Sahariah. Sahariah felt that her siri’ was disregarded, not only because of Nia’s refusal, but also because of Muhlis’ scolding. In response, Sahariah stabbed Muhlis in the chest with a large knife (Ind.: parang) which she used in wet-rice cultivation. He died in front of Nia and Sahariah. Then, Sahariah went home and her family called the police to pick her up at Nia’s parents’ house to protect her from the anger of Muhlis’ family. Sahariah proudly stated that:

Although I never planned to kill him, I thought this was the way it should be. I did the right thing. If I did not kill him, he would kill me some day because he always threatened that he was going to kill me. He did not expect that I was going to kill him because he said: ‘What can a woman do?’ But I did it, I killed him. Most importantly, I defended my family siri’. I felt satisfied, though I have been sentenced for seven and a half years (Sahariah, 30 years, unmarried, farmer, never attended school, interviewed on 6 December 2000).

When I asked who had demanded that she defend the family siri’, she replied that it was not necessary to wait for a command from the members of the family. Then, she said:

Nia didn’t have a brother, her father was too old to defend himself, I didn’t have a husband, so I felt that I was responsible as the to masiri’ of the family towards Nia and her sweetheart’s wrong-doing (Sahariah 6 December 2000).

This case indicates that a woman becoming to masiri’ for the family when the male members of the family are not available to fill this role. Sahariah’s act occurred because of her feeling of sharing one siri’ (Bug.: massé’di siri’), and indicates how a woman can express her feeling of siri’ in a siri’ situation through killing. For her family and for people who understood what was going on, Sahariah was not

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13 I visited women in prison to find out the reasons they were imprisoned and how they were related to marital violence. I chose two prisons, one in the metropolitan city of Makassar and another in Pare-Pare Municipality. In fact, the prison in Makassar caught fire in 1999, consequently women prisoners were relocated to Maros. I was directed to conduct my interviews in Maros Prison (LP Maros) with fourteen women convicted of various crimes—six murderers, three drug offenders, two thieves, one case of abortion, one case of siri’, and one case of deception. However, only 13 were successfully interviewed, as one of them escaped from the court hearing. Interviews were conducted on 5–6 December 2000.

14 In such cases, it is assumed that one takes oneself to the police station to protect oneself from the anger of the opponent. Otherwise, it will lead to an act of main hakim sendiri (Ind.: taking the law into one’s own hands), as reported by local newspapers in Makassar (see, for example, Baso and Idrus 2002:205).
acting as a male, but as the defender of her family siri’. For others, however, she could be considered a ‘devil woman’. People in the jail commented that it could be difficult for Sahariah to find a prospective husband, not only because she was a killer, but also because she would be in her late 30s when she is released from prison. From this point of view, it is obvious that the lessened possibility of finding a partner in the future is not only related to her crime which indicates her non-modest behaviour (dë’na malebbi’), but is also connected with her age. Sahariah realised this, but during the interview, Sahariah never expressed regret.

In addition, women also participate in controlling siri’ by, for example, when men are around, instead of asking the men to get away from the women, older women usually ask young women to keep away from men in order to protect themselves from siri’. In the past, when a woman is found ‘stealing a glance’ at a man, it was already reckoned as a transgression of siri’.

The notion of siri’ depends upon women’s behaviour is reflected in Bugis ade’ that a woman should at all times be under someone’s protection. If she is single, no matter how old she is, she is under the care and protection of her parents, her brothers (if any), and/or other male relatives; once she marries, she is under her husband’s protection. Parental power is transformed into conjugal power and transferred to her husband. Thus, to maintain siri’, pressure is not just experienced by the women who are being protected, but also by their male relatives who act as tomasiri’ (Bug.: siri’ defender).

Abdullah notes that people who may not understand this situation would assume that this control is aimed at restricting women’s freedom. In fact, he argues, this control takes place in order to prevent any ‘improper behaviour’ in which women may engage and to protect women from any forbidden contact, which would be seen as a violation of ade’. A Bugis woman may become involved in public activities which are considered appropriate for women. In doing so, however, she is controlled by ade’ which is practised in the life of the Bugis family. Any violation of these norms has to be handled by ade’ in accordance with the values of Bugis society (Abdullah 1985).

A Bugis woman is placed in a ‘position of honour,’ as a jewel (intang paramata) of the family, on the one hand, but her freedom is restricted, on the other. From this perspective, siri’ may legitimate any kind of violence against her and at the same time it may become the potential source of violence since tomasiri’—who can be men or women—have the power to define which behaviour transgresses siri.’ However, such restrictions are difficult to sustain these day since women attend school and work outside home. Although women in Kulo

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15 Chabot (1996) gives a similar account in regard to social intercourse between the sexes for the Makassarese, a related ethnic group in South Sulawesi.

16 The 1999 National Socio-Economic Survey indicates that school participation rate (APS) in South
participated in this trend to become educated and move into the work force, in practice, they often found themselves caught in a contradiction between working in the modern economy and the expectation that women should not be in situations where the family honour could be under threat.

These restrictions are expressed through a number of symbols related to women’s vulnerability in social interaction. Elders said: a woman is like a mirror (Bug.: makkunrai‘ padai kaca‘). A lontara‘ cited by Matthes states:

A woman is like a glass. When she is gossiped about for an alleged wrong-doing, the glass is cracked. If the gossip is true, the glass is broken and worthless.

Apa’ iatu riasengngé makkunrai riébara ‘i kaca. Iana engka biritta temma decénnu, riébara‘nitu mallese’. Narékko mannessani pangkaúkkena riébara‘ni pada tosa kacáé, reppa’ni de ‘ga bua‘-buat’na (Matthes 1872:102).

However, regardless of whether or not the gossip is true, the glass (Bug.: kaca) is cracked. Once a glass is broken (reppa‘), it becomes worthless (déggaga bua‘-buat’na). The symbol of women as kaca reflects the women’s vulnerability in everyday social interaction.

A similar image is used in a contemporary popular Bugis song entitled Ana’ Daraé (Young Women) which exemplifies women’s vulnerability in their interactions with men:

Ana’ Daraé

Nappai ritangnga‘-tangnga‘
Only a quick stare
Nappai rike‘bi‘ mato
Only a side glance
Naseng to mélo rialéna
She thinks I have fallen in love
Nasenni icanring aléna
She thinks I have become her boyfriend

Nappai icanring-canring
Only a temptation
Nappai rike‘bi‘-ke‘ bi‘ haé …
Only stealing a glance at her …
Na’béréanni aléna
She has surrendered herself
Nasengngi mélo‘ ipubéné
She thinks I will marry her

Idi‘tu ana’ daraé
We are young girls
Aja’ lalo mumalléré
Don’t let yourselves be tempted
Idi‘tu ana’ daraé
We are young girls
Pada jagaiwi aléwé
Take care of yourselves
Padaki camming rasaé
We women are like a mirror
Repa‘na repa‘no
Once we are broken
Dé’gaga betuanna
We mean nothing

Sulawesi for females aged between 19 and 24, is 3.75 percent in rural area and 25.12 percent in urban areas. Furthermore, participation rates for females age 15 and over who are economically active (TAPK) are 36.32 percent in urban areas which is slightly higher than TPAK for females in rural areas, 36.71 percent. In fact, South Sulawesi has the lowest TPAK of all the provinces across the archipelago (BPS 2000).

17 Despite the fact that the lontara‘ I quoted from Matthes is concerned with pappangaja‘ (Bug.: advice) for arung makkunrai (noble woman), this pappangaja‘ is relevant to the everyday life of the Bugis, whether or not they are arung (noble descent). The text was transliterated by Mukhlis Hadrawi (1 April 2000).

18 In a similar account, Mattulada (1995:441) also analyses the symbol of women as a glass in relation to women’s social role.

19 This song was written by a male writer—Harun Husein—and sung by a male singer—Amal Mangile.
This song embodies the metaphors for the sexual double standard which surrounds women’s lives. Men interpret conduct based on their own points of view. The notion of a woman as a mirror (Bug.: camming) or a porcelain plate (penné pinceng) demonstrates that woman should be carefully protected since both mirrors and porcelain are easily broken. Once broken, they become worthless (nadéggaga burayanna).

The term maperrengngi (Bug.: able to hold steadily) is derived from the verb perreng (to hold). It refers to the steadiness of a person’s desire must be strictly controlled, not just by herself but also by her family because a woman’s sexual purity has a significant impact on her social status in Bugis society. On account of this, a woman is expected to enfold herself in her honour, so she is in a steady state (perrengngi alêna). Otherwise, she is ‘wild’. But the saying indicates that men become desirous of women precisely because women’s desire is not visible (padai wekkeng situttu’ê). To put this another way, women control men’s desire through their unexpressed desire. In spite of the fact that this saying comes from lontara’, its application can be found in everyday life of the Bugis, especially when elders give advice to young people.

Alternatively, men have to be conscious (maringngerrang) because men’s desire is visible (marisaliwengngi), marisaliweng deriving from the noun root saliwen which means outside, literally open. If a man has a good consciousness (madécéng paringngerranna), he encircles himself with his self-control in order to protect himself from deviant behaviour (malaweng pangkaukeng). One who is conscious (maringngerrang) will behave appropriately. When a person is doing something wrong, or looks as if she/he is about to, another person present will warn her/him: ‘Be conscious!’ (Padécéngi paringngerrammu!). By contrast, if one has done something wrong, others will say: ‘She/he was not conscious’ (Dé’na paringngerranna).

The term maperrengngi (Bug.: able to hold steadily) is derived from the verb perreng (to hold). This term carries the connotation that a man’s desire is like a leaky roof, it is open. Women’s desire is like a corset. That is why men are desirous. Women’s desire is hidden, which means it can be held steady.


21 In her discussion on cockfighting in Luwu, Errington (1989:152–154) analyses the importance of apperrengngeng (steadiness) for men in relation to bravery and siri.

22 Bugis advice (Ind.: petuah Bugis) states that there are five kinds of deviation (alawengengngé): deviation of heart (Bug.: malaweng ati), deviation of speaking (malaweng ada), deviation of clothing (malaweng caré-caré), deviation of place of sitting (malaweng tudungng), and deviation of behaviour (malaweng pangkaukeng) (Machmud 1976:45).

23 Errington (1989:89–90) concludes that an individual’s paringngerrang (memory) in Luwu is associated with his/her concentration and awareness.

Irakaki’ penné pinceng
Like a porcelain plate
Nabuang narepa’
Fallen and broken
Nadé’ gaga buryanna.
It becomes meaningless.
Thus, male-openness (*marisaliweng*) and female-hiddenness (*maperreng*) reflect the dichotomy of Bugis constructions of male and female sexuality. This complementarily is not just about the attributes of the masculine-feminine, but can also be associated with male-female behaviour in terms of sexuality. In fact, a woman’s sexuality is firmly controlled because it is considered more shameful than the sexuality of men. This is reflected in a Bugis saying that ‘men have only one *siri*’, women have ninety-nine (*urané séddimi *siri*’na, makkunraié *aséra pulona aséra *siri*’na). The opposition of one and ninety-nine is in no way synonymous with the proportion of number, this saying merely implies the vulnerability of women in regard to *siri*’.

Since a woman’s body is often thought to represent the moral integrity of the family (and the society), breaking the code for conduct is considered to dishonour the family and the society. Hence, it is not because women cannot be open (Bug.: *marisaliweng*) in reference to their sexuality. It is simply considered ‘bad’ for them to express desire openly. On the other hand, men who are not able to express desire openly are regarded as not men, a position referred to by the term *calabai* (cross-gender).

Millar (1983:487–488) points out that in Bugis culture, a male is expected to behave aggressively as well as formally. The aggressiveness and the formality of a man’s behaviour are associated with his performance and social location. By contrast, a woman’s passive behaviour is associated with her honour. To complement the behaviour expected of men, women are supposed to be obedient and timid, not only to show her honour (*alebbireng*), but also to prevent transgression of *siri*’.

Errington notes that the opposition of active-male and passive-female is connected to social function of each sex. Men are responsible for protecting their family and extending their kinship networks, while women function not just to protect the ‘blood’ of the family, but also to preserve the *siri*’ of the family (1977:53). In this view, women are the *siri*’ holders, therefore, they are expected to be calm and patient, qualities encompassed by the term *malebbi*’ because to be *malebbi*’ is also attached to *siri*’.

Accordingly, a Bugis aphorism states:

> Love and desire are lovely things in which there are words that cannot be uttered, but the beauty of love will be meaningless when it is disgraced.


Such advice is usually given to lovers to warn them to be vigilant because it is believed that the boundary between love and disgrace is very small. Once it is crossed, it turns disgraceful. A *lontara*’ cited by Matthes states:

> [A] woman is symbolised as green wood. A man is signified as a burning ember. Even if the wood is green, it will still burn if it is close to the ember. This is the reason why a woman is prohibited to be in close proximity with men. Because she will become insensitive to accidental physical contact with men if it has become a habit to be around men.


See, for example, Brenner’s (1998) analysis on the relationship between men’s/women’s control of desire and potency in Javanese society; and Bennett (2003) on her discussion of the invisibility of female desire and visibility of male desire in Lombok.

Blood’ in this sense is associated with social location (Bug.: *onro*). That is women marry hypergammously and hence can increase the proportion of ‘white blood’ in their descendants, white blood being a marker of divine descent and hence high status.

The text was transliterated by Mukhlis Hadrawi (1 April 2000).
While the symbol of woman as green wood \((aju \ mamata)\) indicates the sensitivity of female sexuality in relation to the opposite sex, the symbol of man as an ember \((wara \ api)\) suggests that a man can easily be tempted, in this sense, by a woman. If being in close proximity with men becomes a habit for a woman, it indicates that she has become insensitive to accidental physical contact with men \((dé’na \ takkini’ \ uli’na \ rioroańé)\). Therefore, women have to, as much as possible, move away from men in order to prevent any dishonourable behaviour. Hence, male-ember \((wara \ api)\) and female-green wood \((aju \ mamata)\) are not just about attributes of masculine-feminine, but are also associated with Bugis construction of male-female sexuality.

An egg \((tello)\) is another symbol for a woman. If an egg falls and breaks, it becomes worthless. The destiny of a woman who has fallen into a 'hole' \((e.g. \ premartial \ pregnancy)\) is equated with an egg. If someone attempts to marry her—whether the man who has impregnated her or another man who intends to save her and her family from shame \((massampo \ siri)\)—it is usually commented that a woman is like a broken egg, if it is scooped up, it will never be a pure egg because dirt will be scooped up along with it \((makkunraié \ padai \ tello’ \ repa \ é, \ komusirarni, \ maccoei \ rotae)\). Such a woman will be labelled with various popular insults, as mentioned earlier, such as a damaged woman \((makkunrai \ masolang)\), and will never be returned to her original state \((i.e. \ virgin)\). This is because a woman’s virginity is regarded as a symbol of purity, and failure to sustain this purity is synonymous with losing her honour \((Adriana \ et \ al. \ 1998:4–5, \ Bennett \ 2002:78–82)\).

Gender symbolisation, e.g. women as mirror \((camming)\), porcelain plate \((penné \ pinceng)\), glass \((kaca)\), green wood \((aju \ mamata)\) or egg \((tello)\) reflects sexual asymmetry in Bugis society. As Ortner \((1974:72)\) argues, the problem of sexual asymmetry is located at the level of cultural ideology and symbols. The following case encountered during my fieldwork in Kulo illustrates the way in which a woman’s reputation is irrevocably damaged by a premarital pregnancy.

**Nadirah and Aco: loose girl, lecherous boy**

In Kulo, unmarried pregnant girls are usually successfully married off to whoever impregnated them. Nadirah is an exception. I first met Nadirah, a wedding decorator, when she decorated the house of my host family for their son’s wedding. She was a twenty three year old woman who became pregnant out of marriage, and married the father of the child’s father who acted to cover someone else’s siri’ \((Bug.: \ passampo \ siri’\)) \(27\). This marriage was conducted in order to save face from siri’ \((massampo \ siri’)\) and to provide a legal father for her baby.

Soon after recognising her pregnancy, she notified her boyfriend, Aco. But, he was not financially ready to marry her. When people started to gossip about her pregnancy, she urged him to marry her. Aco finally agreed to marry her after working hard and collecting a certain amount of money. Unfortunately, as Nadirah’s mother was not aware of her daughter’s pregnancy, his proposal was rejected because the expected dui’ balanca \((spending \ money)\)\(^2\) for the wedding ceremony

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\(^2\)Bridewealth in Bugis consists of two elements, namely sompa \((Bug.: \ rankprice)\) and dui’ menré’ \((spending \ money)\). Sompa is measured according to the ascriptive rank of the bride, that is the sum of money called in former currency, rella’, while dui’ menré is determined based on the ascending status of the bride \((Millar \ 1989; \ Pelras \ 1996)\). At present, the sompa is only symbolic, being announced during the wedding ceremony, while spending money may be brought on the day of bringing the spending money.
was beyond his capacity. This resulted in marriage cancellation. Aco left the village to save his face from shame because of ma’duta tenri tangke (Bug.: proposal refusal), while Nadirah was left alone with her hidden problem. She finally told her mother when it was too late because Aco, in fact, had already married another woman from a neighbouring village when Nadirah’s mother finally requested to marry her daughter.

Informants told me that in addition to Nadirah, people also gossiped about her mother’s silliness because she could not recognise the pregnancy of her daughter, while other could. In Bugis, elders are usually able to identify between virgin girl ana’ dara (Bug.: ana’ dara) and non-virgin girl (Bug.: tennia ni ana’ dara) by an examination of her body, for example, the sparkling of her eyes, expressed as ‘she lose the spark of her eyes’ (marunttuni caya matanna), a speedy pulse in her throat, or a deep hole in the back of her knee. A girl who has these signs, whether or not she is pregnant, is called a damaged woman (makkunrai masolang) which carries the connotation that a girl has been sexually involved with the opposite sex and should marry the man who has had sexual relation with her. Otherwise, she is ‘unsaleable’.

In order to save face from siri’ (massampo siri’), Nadirah had to marry Aco’s father, under an ‘agreement’ of kawin-cerai (Ind.: divorce right after married) which is an offence under Islamic law, as the objective of marriage is to achieve a happy and an ever lasting marriage (Kompilasi Hukum Islam 1999/2000, Chapter II:3), and not to get a divorce afterwards. Given that Nadirah and her son live with both her mother and her grandmother in the house, people said: they were given no respect by the man because they had no man who can guard them (ritua-tuaimi nasaba’ dègaga mpuranéiwi). This illustrates the importance of a man in regard to the siri’ of the family. It appeared that if a man were there, the circumstances would be different.

Nadirah’s story became everybody’s business in the village. Each time I asked someone about Nadirah, people would mention her premarital pregnancy, and her story was always an interesting topic to talk about. Even though people also talked about the irresponsible behaviour of Nadirah’s son’s biological father (Aco), people even felt sorry for Nadirah’s family because of the refusal of his proposal. During an interview with Nadirah, she tried to explain her situation to me without even mentioning her unexpected pregnancy. She said that her son was a piteous little boy who had become the victim of her problematic marriage. Surprisingly, she still looks forward to having her son’s father, Aco, back in the future, expecting that he will divorce his wife.

Nadirah has become an instance of a ‘loose girl’ who has to struggle by herself because of her ‘wrong-doing’ in the past. I was told that parents in Kulo warn their young girls, using Nadirah as a negative example.

Gender in social encounters: the house and the public place

Houses in South Sulawesi are, however, more than functional shelters for their inhabitants, or aesthetically pleasing material objects. They are sacred (sakral) spaces in which people are born, marry and die and where these occasions are socially and ritually acknowledged (Robinson 1998:169).

For the Bugis, the house has a great importance.28 Bugis cosmology divides the world

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28 See, for example, Fox (1993:141–142), in his article on Rotinese house design, notes that house is a
into the upper world (Bug.: Boting Langi’), the middle world (Lino) and the lower world (Toddang Toja), based on the myth of La Galigo. This cosmological viewpoint is reflected in the structure of Bugis house which consists of a space under the roof (rakkéang), the body of the house (alé bola) and area beneath the house (awa sao) (Mattulada, 1998:106). This vertical ordering of a ‘miniature cosmos’ is typical in Southeast Asia (Reid 1988:66).

The alé bola is divided into three parts based on gender: the front, the middle and back parts. Each part of the house has its own post and the central post, the house’s navel (posi’ bola), is located in the middle part of the house. Either end has its own entrance. The room for the married couple is located in the middle of the house. A house without a middle part is usually divided by a door through which other people (to laing) are strictly forbidden to pass.

Mattulada indicates the difference between a guest (to polé, literally means the ‘one who comes’) and family by describing their relationship with the house. A to polé cannot even step onto the lowest rung of the steps of the stilt house (Ind.: rumah panggung; Bug.: bola riase’) without the permission of the host, unless she/he is regarded as family (Mattulada 1995:56). But for the Bugis, people who are not related by blood can also be regarded as if a sibling (Bug.: passilessurengeng, from the word silessureng, meaning sibling). A guest (to polé) who steps on the steps of the main entrance without the host’s consent is regarded as transgressing the siri’ of the family. This is also true if the guest climbs the steps at the back entrance. Thus, to polé-front and family-back reflect the dualism between the guests and the families associated with the layout of the house (see Errington 1979).

In Kulo, to polé usually ascend the steps at the front of the house. The family or people who are considered as family may climb the steps at the back of the house, even though they may also ascend via the front of the house. At first glance, this arrangement is merely about different entrances between the family and outsiders (to laing). But, I observed that male family tended to enter the house from the front, while female family entered the house from the back. Furthermore, when there are guests in the living room, the female family members (particularly young girls) would enter the house from the back, especially if the guests were men. In contrast, male family members are reluctant to enter the back part of the house when women gather together. But the division of the house based on gender is not rigid. Indeed, women spend their time at the front part of the house when non-related men are not around (Pelras 1996:161).

In her article on The Platform House: Expression of a Regional Identity in the Modern Indonesian Nation, Robinson identifies domestic arrangements in relation to the interior divi-
sion of space among the Bugis (as well as Makassarese and Mandarese): front-back, public-private, strangers-family, outsiders-intimates and others-us (1993:228–242). The door mediating between the public and the private spaces of the house is off-limits to all but family members, and strangers/outsiders/others are prohibited to pass (Errington 1979:9), unless permitted by the host.

This arrangement is aimed to divide between the front and the back parts of the house. The front side is regarded as the place for guests and males, usually a space with no wall, symbolising ‘freedom.’ While the back part of the house is considered as the place for females and family, limited by walls in accordance with the principle of ‘protection’. For instance, when a girl (ana’ dara) serves the male guests with drinks and snacks, she is only allowed to bring them up to the middle part of the house or to the door between front and middle parts of the house. Thus, the wife or mother will bring the serving to the living room. This arrangement prevents the girl for coming into direct contact with the opposite sex, which may transgress the family siri’.

However, this arrangement has changed significantly in recent years. An ana’ dara may now bring light refreshment into the living room, but leaves the room as soon as possible.

In the contemporary Bugis house, despite the fact that modernity has influenced its structure, the basic principle of the house in regard to gender remains the same. For example, the room for the married couple is usually located close to the living room, while the room for girls is situated behind or next to this primary bedroom or in the middle of the house where the family room is positioned, a place where to laing are prohibited. A room for boys is at the back of the house, usually close to the back door, or at the side of the house with its own door to the outside, so they can come and go without encumbrance. This implies that the layout of the house not only dichotomises between ‘family’ and ‘to laing’, as Errington (1979:9) reported in Luwu, but also shows the division between male and female spaces of social interaction within and around the house. Most importantly, this arrangement aims to ‘protect’ the female members of the family from any offence which may result in siri’.

Social interaction in the house indicates cross-gender relations in terms of proximity. While father-son relationship seems to be reserved, the mother-daughter relationship is warm and supportive. The mother is the mediator of the family, not only between father and son, but especially between father and daughter. Open discussion between members of the family usually takes place during dinner for urban people, as the members of the family usually gather in the afternoon. In the village, I observed a number of times both in the Bakris and in other families, that such moment occurs either at noon, during/after lunch or dinner. Unlike western culture, the family discussion is limited and formal. Children are not supposed to become involved in conversation among elders unless they are asked for their comment. Otherwise, they will be regarded as non-respectful children. Sister-brother relationships are passionate and warm, as reflected in the relationship between Wé Tenri Abéng and her twin brother, Sawérigading, the main protagonist described in the La Galigo epic.

Previous studies of the Bugis, such as Millar (1983, 1989) and Pelras (1996) have portrayed the relationship between men and women as egalitarian in many respects. How-

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32 Personal communication with Pak Anwar Ibrahim, a lecturer at the Department of Bugis Language, Faculty of Arts, Hasanuddin University (6 May 2000).
ever, both my male and female informants stated that females are ‘lower’ than males.\(^{33}\) Mattulada (1995:440) discusses Bugis women’s role based on customary law (pangngadereng) from the Lontara’ Latoa which states that men and women may both be involved in deliberation (Ind.: permusyawaratan), but women’s opinions can only be used as a complement and not to make a final decision because women are considered to have ‘physical’ as well as ‘psychological’ weaknesses. That women are fragile creatures has become a general ideology. But, I presume that Mattulada’s argument in this sense is related to public decision-making, which is considered to be men’s arena.

At the community level, village meetings best illustrate this role difference. Whilst both men and women have the right to speak in the forum, men have more authority than women. At the household level, the wife has the same right as the husband to express an opinion. Nevertheless, the final decision is usually in the hands of the husband for matters related to the outside. Take, for example, when Pak Bakri, his wife, Ibu Darma, and his daughter, Ati, were discussing the possibility of Ati becoming a civil servant. Pak Ali, from a neighbouring village, had promised ‘to take care of it’ in exchange for Rp 3,000,000.00 (about A$600 at current exchange rates). Ibu Darma and Ati refused, assuming that there was no guarantee that the position would come through. But Pak Bakri decided to pay, even though he had to borrow some money from his father-in-law. In fact, he was deceived, his daughter did not become a civil servant. The money was gone and Pak Ali kept promising to repay, or sometimes hide whenever Pak Bakri came to his house. I witnessed Ati crying when she found out that her application was unsuccessful. When I asked why Ibu Darma did not prevent Pak Bakri from taking part in the deal, she said: ‘It’s his decision, I can give my opinion, but he is the one who makes the decision’ (Ind.: Itu keputusan bapak, saya bisa bicara, tapi bapak yang memutuskan). She further stated that because he is the kepala keluarga (head of the family), he has the authority to decide. This illustrates that decisions about relations with the outside are in the hands of men, regardless of whether or not women agree with the decisions. Ati was reluctant to comment on her father’s action, not only because of the distance between them, but also because she thought that her opinions were worthless in this instance.

**Conclusion**

When speaking about siri’, one must realise that siri’ is a concept which is linked to gender as well as honour and onro, but the defence of siri’ can be performed by both sexes. This is supported by my argument in Sahariah’s case, although the majority of to masiri’ are males, she—as a woman—became a to masiri’. Thus, she acted as the agent to maintain siri’ of the family. The examination of siri’, however, differs according to social status; the higher the status the more likely siri’ to occur.

A number of Bugis symbols for women, such as mirror (Bug.: camming), glass (kaca), porcelain plate (penné pinceng), green wood (aju mamata), and egg (tello’) reflect the vulnerability of women in everyday social interaction, particularly with the opposite sex. In addition, the layout of Bugis’ house mirrors the division between male and female spaces of social intercourse which aims to ‘protect’ female members of the family from any offence which may transgress siri’.

The Bugis construction of male and female sexuality is an important complementarity in-

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\(^{33}\) Helliwell’s (1995:364) study exemplifies similar features on the inequality of Gerai in the Dayak ‘egalitarian’ society.
forming the Bugis concepts of gender differences. To understand these differences, one must consider masculine/feminine in relation to good/bad attribute. However, such dichotomy is not formed in a single form in which male as good and female as bad. It is rather to explain that the term good is used for making sense only in opposition to bad, just as Errington (1989:71–72) contrasts the space in Bugis house between ‘the front guest area’ and the ‘back family area’ to public space as opposed term of private space because both spaces are considered social. Thus, it is a mistake to equate western constructions of gender directly with categories of male/female to good/bad, front/back or public/private.

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