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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools and the influence of Bissu figures within the patriarchal cultural structure of South Sulawesi. The research aims to uncover how Bissu, as cultural figures, impact women's roles in leadership positions within these religious institutions and the broader societal acceptance of female leadership. he researches employs a descriptive qualitative approach, primarily utilizing a literature review to trace the historical and cultural influences of Bissu on women's leadership in South Sulawesi. Relevant literary sources were identified and analyzed to elaborate on the extent of Bissu's impact on the patriarchal framework and its implications for women's roles in Islamic boarding schools. The findings reveal that Bissu figures, known for embodying both male and female characteristics, play a significant indirect role in shaping the acceptance of women in leadership positions within South Sulawesi's Islamic boarding schools. While Bissu are often viewed as cultural symbols representing women in influential roles, their presence also sparks debate, with some viewing them as contrary to Islamic teachings, and others as vital cultural icons. This study provides a novel analysis of the intersection between gender, culture, and religious leadership in South Sulawesi, highlighting the unique role of Bissu figures in influencing female leadership within Islamic boarding schools. It offers new insights into the ongoing tension between patriarchal traditions and the evolving role of women in religious education. The research and the order structure gender equality in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi, where women's leadership to the order structure and tension between patriarchal traditions and the evolving role of women in religious education. The research and the evolving role of women in religious education the evolving role of women in religious education between in religious leadership in South Sulawesi, bighlighting the uniq

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Islamic Boarding Schools, Bissu Figures, Patriarchal Culture, Gender Equality in Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

Islamic residential schools are Islamic educational institutions that play a vital role in the preservation and maintenance of Islamic culture in Indonesia (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021). Islamic boarding schools can establish norms that are distinct from those of other educational institutions (Puspitasari et al., 2021). The *kyai* or *ustadz* and *santri* devote themselves to the continuity of the teaching and learning process, which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Islamic boarding institutions (Herbstrith et al., 2020). The proliferation of Islamic boarding institutions throughout the nation has significantly contributed to the formation of a religious Indonesia. Initially, males served as the headmasters of the boarding school. However, over time, Islamic boarding institutions began to allow *ustadzah*/ women to lead them.

In the early 20th century, female-led Islamic residential schools began to emerge. The fact that a woman founded a number of prominent Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi reflects the region's patriarchal culture. Prior to the arrival of Islam, the Bugis believed in five gender-based categories of individuals. Specifically, *burane* (men), *makkunrai* (women), *calabai* (men who dress as women), *calalai* (women who don men's styles), and *bissu* (gender-neutral, both men and women) (Ismoyo, 2020).

Women's leadership is one issue that is widely discussed by various circles. The discussion about women's leadership has its own polemic. The number of opinions that agree and disagree on the issue of women's leadership is due to the significant increase in the recognition of basic human rights in all parts of the world. Bissu is one of the indigenous cultures of South Sulawesi that plays a significant role in the region's patriarchal

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culture structure (Ismoyo et al., 2023). Especially in the realms of religion and pesantren, women are rarely given the opportunity to lead within the patriarchal tradition (Arifi & Fathurrohman, 2023). However, Bissu as a cultural heritage held by women in the society of South Sulawesi demonstrates that women have the potential to become respected and acknowledged society leaders. The presence of bissu figures can reduce the impact of patriarchal culture in South Sulawesi, particularly in the context of women's leadership in Islamic boarding institutions. Even though the bissu figure does not explicitly advocate for gender equality, the existence of a bissu as a respected spiritual figure can help dispel negative perceptions of women and strengthen women's position in Islamic educational institutions.

The existence of Bissu and the values it promotes can influence people's perceptions of women's leadership in the *pesantren* context (Pabbajah, 2020). Women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools has been limited to date, although women have commanded several *pesantren*. With the values espoused by Bissu (Ilyas & Al-Rasyid, 2018), such as local sagacity, bravery, and gender equality, it is anticipated that the community's perception of women as leaders in Islamic boarding schools will shift and grow in respect. Women's participation in leadership and decision-making can be facilitated by the existence of bissu who are respected and have social influence. Additionally, the prominence of bissu figures can pave the way for women to participate in *pesantren* leadership and decision-making.

Women's leadership in South Sulawesi is discussed (Ernanda, 2023). The influence of bissu figures on Islamic boarding institutions has never been studied by previous researchers. Existing research reveals only a few facts about women's leadership in South Sulawesi apart from the presence of bissu figures. This research will demonstrate that despite a strong patriarchal culture, the people of South Sulawesi have provided opportunities for women to actively partake in public leadership.

This study seeks to shed light on the societal stigma in South Sulawesi, which asserts that Islam and the upheld culture of society have contributed to the provision of opportunities for women in Islamic boarding schools. The influence of the interpretation of religious texts based on the interpretation of classical scholars also influences the provision of "half-hearted" opportunities and public recognition of women's leadership. This research also seeks to identify a link between bissu figures and female leadership. Therefore, this article argues that bissu figures influence women's leadership to some extent.

Therefore, the topic of women's leadership in Islamic boarding institutions and the influence of bissu figures in South Sulawesi's patriarchal culture merits additional attention and discussion. To achieve gender equality and reduce the influence of patriarchal culture, it is necessary to respond to existing social dynamics and create opportunities for women to participate in leadership and decision-making in all aspects of life, including Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the relationship between women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools and the influence of Bissu figures within the patriarchal cultural structure of South Sulawesi. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of cultural phenomena, particularly in the context of gender and leadership. By focusing on the descriptive aspects, the research aims to uncover the underlying dynamics that shape women's roles in these religious institutions, offering insights that are grounded in cultural and historical contexts.

Data collection for this study primarily involves a literature review, wherein relevant library sources are systematically identified and selected. These sources include scientific journals, books, research reports, and other credible publications related to the research topic. The process begins with a comprehensive search for literature that directly addresses the influence of Bissu figures and the broader context of women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools. Once identified, these sources are meticulously reviewed to extract pertinent information that contributes to the research objectives. The data obtained from the literature review are organized and analyzed in alignment with the research questions and objectives. The analysis process involves categorizing the data based on key themes and patterns that emerge from the literature. This thematic analysis allows for a structured exploration of how Bissu figures influence women's leadership within the patriarchal

cultural framework. By synthesizing the information from diverse sources, the study develops a coherent narrative that links historical and cultural influences to contemporary issues in women's leadership.

Ethical considerations are integral to this research, particularly given the sensitive nature of cultural and genderrelated topics. The study adheres to academic integrity by ensuring that all sources are accurately cited and that the information is presented objectively. Moreover, the research respects the cultural significance of Bissu figures, and the communities involved, striving to avoid misrepresentation or cultural insensitivity. By maintaining a balanced and respectful approach, the study upholds ethical standards while contributing valuable insights to the discourse on women's leadership and cultural influence in South Sulawesi.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Women's Leadership in Islam and South Sulawesi Culture

The discourse on women's leadership is a discussion regarding the role and dignity of women in positions of leadership. Traditional views on gender, religion, and culture are the primary factors that serve as benchmarks for women's leadership. These factors influence the assumption that women are the weaker gender. This presumption contributes to the marginalization of women's roles in various aspects of life (Nuroniyah, 2016).

Ibn Khaldun defines leadership as the obligation imposed by the Shari'a to actualize the world's and the hereafter's benefit (Omonijo & Anyaegbunam, 2020). According to this definition, leadership is an activity. Women have equal rights to occupy positions of leadership and participate actively in society and politics. They demonstrate that women possess the same abilities and potential as males and should be afforded the same opportunities to develop and attain leadership positions.

The Qur'an and hadith do not specify the qualifications for a leader. The Al-Qur'an instructs humanity to always be just, uphold the law and follow the leader (ulul amri). Allah swt says in QS al-Nisa/4:59 "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and Ulil Amri (those in authority) among you. Then, if you differ on something, then return it to Allah (the Qur'an) and the Messenger (the Sunnah), if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is more important (for you) and better consequences" (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

Sayid Qutub argued in his interpretation of the verse that obedience to *uli al-amri* is *qath'i* in nature (Ismail, 2020). Because obedience to leaders is an actual manifestation of obedience to Allah and His Prophet. In addition, Sheikh Muhammad Husein Tabataba'i explains in his book al-Mizan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an that a servant's obedience to Allah and Rasulullah will be flawless if it is accompanied by obedience to the leader. This is because submission to the leader is an integral part of submission to Allah and His Messenger (Qutub, 1995).

In general, Islam emphasizes that every individual (regardless of gender) must meet certain leadership requirements and criteria, without exception. Capability, integrity, and qualifications are essential leadership qualities for both men and women. Therefore, women who fulfill these requirements and criteria must have equal access to leadership positions as men.

Sharia doctrine emphasizes that women are no longer subordinate to males, as they were during the Jahiliyya period. Both share the same status in the eyes of Allah (Muftadin, 2022). The distinction is piety, as Q.S al-Hujurat/49:13 explainsed: "O people! Indeed, We have created you from a male and a female, then We made you nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is the most pious. Indeed, Allah is All-Aware" (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

The verse explains that the thing that differentiates between men and women is the level of piety. This verse is at the same time a rebuttal to the notion that women have different roles from men and must prioritize women's roles as mothers and leaders in the household. The concept offered by the Sharia emphasizes that women are no longer subordinate to men as they were during the Jahiliyya era. Both occupy the same position before Allah (Arifi & Fathurrohman, 2023).

Based on Islamic teachings, leadership is an important component of God's mandate to mankind (Herlinawati, 2020). The leadership system described in the Qur'an includes trust, is, *shura, muhasabah*, rule of law, *bay'ah*,

khilafa, wakalah and *amr bil ma'ruf wa nahy an al-munkar* (Irwansyah et al., 2022). Therefore, the leadership system is a central issue in literature and artistic composition.

Fatmawati divides the concept of women's leadership into several things. First, leadership as a human right. Leadership is not a privilege that only men have, but a human right that should be accessed by all people regardless of gender. *Second*, leadership as a strategy to fulfill gender equality. How can women's participation in political leadership be a strategy to fulfill the principle of gender equality and provide a balanced voice in public decision-making. Third, leadership as an instrument of democracy. Women's participation in political leadership can also strengthen democracy, reduce social inequality, and increase government accountability. Fourth, leadership as a social transformation strategy. How women's participation in political leadership can also be a strategy for achieving social transformation, such as changing gender stereotypes and fighting for public policies that are more inclusive and gender-just.

The leadership of women must be consistent with Islamic teachings that guarantee gender equality, justice, and candor. Although it must be acknowledged that women encounter several challenges and obstacles in attaining leadership positions across all fields. This discourse continues to influence discussions about women's rights and roles in society and politics today. Therefore, it is essential to consider differing perspectives and find solutions that are equitable and inclusive for all parties.

The term gender was born out of the social construction of what is called masculine and feminine terms. Therefore, biological differences do not meet the criteria for differentiating male and female social status. The thing that distinguishes only the anatomical structure of the body and reproduction is sex (Andersen, 1988). The men and women are not rivals but partners (azwajan) with the principle of *'sibaliperri-sipurepu'*, that is complementary. They have the advantages and disadvantages of each and will be 'perfect' if the advantages of each unite together to complement each other and cover weaknesses. *Sibaliperri* culture in Bugis society shows a harmony to work hand in hand in building family survival as well as in social life. They like a bamboo stick (mabbulo sipeppa') in carrying out their respective functions (Andersen, 1988).

It is impossible to isolate the history of women's leadership in South Sulawesi from the influence of local customs and culture, which place a premium on local wisdom. The kingdom of Luwu is a well-known example of female leadership in South Sulawesi. South Sulawesi's Luwu kingdom has a lengthy history as one of the region's most important kingdoms (Andersen, 1988). During the reign of King I Manurung (1660-1690), We Tenriukke, a princess from the Luwu Kingdom who governed in the 18th century and was renowned for being a wise and capable ruler, ruled. We Tenriukke were able to successfully expand Luwu's territory to the east and west coasts.

There is even a legend claiming that he can defeat his foes with the aid of his magical knowledge. In addition to We Tenriukke, a number of women played a significant role in the history of South Sulawesi, including Andi Raja Toja, a strong and courageous leader from the kingdom of Gowa. In 1667, he led his troops to victory in the combat against the Dutch. There are also other female characters, such as the princess of the Kingdom of Bone, We Tenri Tatta, who plays a significant role in administering her kingdom. In the 17th century, Ratu I Balla Sungai Cenrana, a princess from the Kingdom of Bone, lead the resistance against the Dutch colonialists. He has a reputation for being courageous and persistent in safeguarding his territory.

During the Dutch colonial period, she became the leader of the Tenriadjeng Sisters women's organization. He remained active in social and political organizations after Indonesia's independence; Andi Jemma, one of the women's leaders who is active in women's organizations in South Sulawesi. He was the former chairman of the Soldiers' Wives Association (PIT) in South Sulawesi, as well as a member of the South Sulawesi Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). He is a well-known comedian and performer in South Sulawesi.

In addition to entertaining the public with his performing arts, he is involved in a variety of social and humanitarian activities; Nurdin Halidah, a female figure from the Bone Regency who is the leader of the local political party, the Bone Community Party. He led the party to become one of the most influential political parties in his region; Andi Tenri Ukka, a South Sulawesi female figure active in the social and humanitarian sectors. He established a number of social and humanitarian institutions, including the Tenriawaru Regional

General Hospital and the Tenri Ukka Drug Rehabilitation Center. Andi Nurul Hidayah is a well-known feminist activist and jurist in South Sulawesi. He is the founder of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (LBH Makassar), which provides legal assistance to underprivileged communities; Syarifah Syehabuddin Wahid is an activist and human rights advocate from South Sulawesi. He is the founder of the Rumah Energi Foundation, an environmental and renewable energy-focused organization.

All of these South Sulawesi leaders have made significant contributions to the fight for women's rights in a variety of disciplines. In South Sulawesi, views on the existence of women in leadership positions are not always positive and are dependent on local customs and culture. There is also the opinion that women are unfit for leadership because they are perceived as timid or unable to make firm decisions. Consequently, the fight for women's leadership privileges continues to this day. The indigenous peoples of South Sulawesi adhere to a patriarchal system, despite the fact that there are a number of prominent women in leadership positions in the region. This is evident from the existence of customary norms that restrict the leadership roles of women. In South Sulawesi, efforts are presently being made to expand leadership opportunities for women considering a growing awareness of the significance of women to development.

Bissu in Patriarchal South Sulawesi Sulture

Bissu is derived from the Bugis word *bessi*, which means "clean." Bissu are considered pure due to their holiness, absence of menstruation, and lack of breasts. As an analogy for the meaning "strong," the Bugis word Bessi can also mean "iron." This provides context for the power possessed by bissu, who are thought to possess preternatural knowledge. Strong can also be applied to bissu, because bissu can assume male, female, or even non-male gender categories. BF Matthes even refers to bissu as priesters and priestesses, or male and female clerics who are known as *calabai* in the Bugis community (Trianto, 2018). According to another theory, bissu is derived from the word "Wesu," which means "no heart" or "without worldly desires." Therefore, bissu are regarded as spirits or sacred entities who can communicate with the ancestors and gods. They are also believed to possess profound spiritual knowledge and serve as intermediaries between the human and spirit realms.

Bissu are clergymen of the Bugis tribe's original religion, the Tolotang faith, whose gender is distinct from that of males and women. Bissu are viewed as demigods who serve as a link between the two domains, namely the human realm and the divine realm, and who sometimes play male roles and sometimes female roles (Mendez et al., 2010). Bissu is a traditional leader, a shaman, and a follower of the traditional religion of the Bugis-Makassar tribe in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, in relation to adat. Bissu is believed to have developed in South Sulawesi prior to the advent of main religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Hindu-Buddhism, where animism and dynamism were prevalent.

It is believed that Bissu connect the mystical world, so their role and status are extremely elevated. The Bugis people believe that bissu are mighty humans with preternatural abilities. Bissu participate in ceremonies as clerics or traditional leaders. Bissu are traditionally identified as individuals with multiple or intersexual gender identities, i.e., individuals with unusual physical characteristics or characteristics, such as having male and female genital organs or having physical characteristics between those of a man and a woman. However, not all bissu have multiple or intersexual gender identities, and they are considered spiritual rather than merely a gender identity. Historiographers and cultural specialists are still debating the origin of Bissu. Nonetheless, numerous theories exist to explain the origin of Bissu.

Bissu originates from Dewa Batara Guru, according to the Bugis-Makassarese people most widely acknowledged theory. Consequently, Dewa Batara Guru transmitted a holy man named La Patta Ri Ambo, who subsequently became the Bissu's ancestor. Then, La Patta Ri Ambo imparted spiritual knowledge and abilities to the subsequent Bissu. According to a second hypothesis, Bissu descends from Bugis-Makassar ancestors who possessed spiritual abilities and were revered as holy people. Consequently, they have the ability to communicate directly with the gods and to execute miracles that are regarded as divine gifts (Ismoyo, 2020).

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The Bugis believe that Bissu was present at the beginning of their tribe. The existence of bissu in Book I of La Galigo is revealed by the tale of Batara Guru, the progenitor of the Bugis who descended from the heavens (*boting langiq*) to the earth (*boriq liung*) to meet his adored wife We Nyili Timo. Batara Guru met his wife on Earth while accompanied by a bissu named Lae-Lae. These bissu contribute to the orderly, secure, and tranquil regulation of life on earth in accordance with the prevalent norms. And spawned numerous cultural and traditional works that serve as community activities.

In ancient times, the Bugis believed in worshiping the supreme deity, or *To PalanroE*. This belief is known as *attoriolong* (adhering to the traditions of preceding generations). *Attoriolong* is a legacy of life-applicable values, instructions, regulations, and norms (Ramli & Basri, 2021). Bissu in *attoriolong* are believed to be intermediaries between the heavens and the earth because they master *Torilangi* Basa, or the language of the sky that only Bissu and the gods can comprehend. Using this mystic language, Bissu recite mantras and prayers in a variety of religious ceremonies, both for state and community organizations and families.

The traditional ceremonies held by the Bissu typically involve determining an auspicious day for important events, such as when to plant rice, when to go on a pilgrimage, when to construct a house, when to crown a leader or monarch, and so on. In the past, traditional Bugis society believed that a king who was not prayed for by Bissu did not have the authority to govern his people. At that time, the kingdoms of Segeri and Bone were known to have a Bissu community called Bissu PatappuloE, which consisted of forty Bissu individuals. Existence of Bissu is currently declining. In some ranreng, this minimum amount of bissu cannot be reached. In Segeri, there are currently no more than four Bissu. Bissu remains in Luwu, Sigeri, Bone, Wajo, Soppeng, Pinrang, Sidenreng Rappang, Pare-pare, and Makassar.

Bissu is a very important figure in the Bugis-Makassar community in South Sulawesi. The definition of Bissu can be explained from several perspectives (Pelras, 1985), including; *First*, bissu is believed to be an ancestral cultural heritage that has an important role in maintaining the stability of Bugis-Makassar society. Since the royal era, Bissu has had a role as guardian and manager of royal artifacts as well as spiritual leaders and religious leaders. *Second*, bissu are considered as religious leaders who teach beliefs that are recognized by the Bugis-Makassar community (Zuhdi, 2018). They play an important role in maintaining the purity of traditional rituals, and act as intermediaries between humans and the unseen world and their ancestors. *Third*, Bissu have extensive knowledge about the customs and culture of the Bugis-Makassar people, including language, traditional ceremonial procedures, and the use of ritual tools. They are also considered as guardians of culture and guardians of cultural archives. *Fourth*, Bissu is a non-binary gender figure who combines masculine and feminine characteristics in himself. This makes them have a role as a mediator between these two characteristics in Bugis-Makassar society(Pratiwi, 2020).

From these various points of view, it can be concluded that Bissu have an important role in maintaining the culture and religion of the Bugis-Makassar community, and have unique and distinctive characteristics as non-binary gender figures.

Bissu and Women's Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools in South Sulawesi

Tracing the women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi is an endeavor to trace women's historical activities. The participation of women in leadership positions in various disciplines indicates that women play a crucial role in the development of Islam in South Sulawesi.

Several important figures who have been motivators for women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi include: Nyai Hajjah Ruminah, a cleric and caretaker of the Al-Hidayah Islamic boarding school in Parepare, a brave and militant cleric in fighting for Islamic education and the liberation of women in South Sulawesi; Siti Khadijah the founder of Madrasah Diniyah Puteri which is in the Great Mosque of Makassar complex. This madrasa was established in 1915 and was the first women's madrasa in Makassar.

Sitti Syarifah, daughter of King Tallo, was appointed as the head of the Taddang Palie Islamic Boarding School in Gowa. He is renowned as a scholar and commentator with extensive knowledge of the Koran. Syarifah Hanum, daughter of the King of Bone, was designated principal of the Darul Jannah Islamic Boarding School in Bone. Hj. Nur Asiah Djafar, founder and leader of the Al-Fatah Islamic Boarding School in Makassar, is known as a scholar with expertise in comprehending hadith who is also involved in social activities, such as establishing schools and providing free medical care.

It is well-known that he is an expert in comprehending the Al-Quran and hadith. Hj. Nurdiniah Datu Bandaro, founder and administrator of the Al-Khairiah Islamic Boarding School in Bone, is also involved in social activities, such as establishing orphanages and providing scholarships to disadvantaged students. Hj. Masni Nadjib, who founded the Al-Washliyah Islamic Boarding School in Makassar in 1954 and was the head of the *pesantren* until his death in 2003, is known as a scholar who has expertise in comprehending the Koran and is also active in social activities, such as assisting the poor and victims of natural disasters. Hj. Masni has made significant contributions to the development of Islamic education in South Sulawesi during his tenure as leader; Hj. Arni Baso Mangunna, who founded the An-Najiyah Islamic Boarding School in Parepare City in 1997. Besides being the leader of the *pesantren*, Hj. Arni is also involved in da'wah and Islamic studies in South Sulawesi, among other things.

Several other female boarding schools that still exist include:

- 1. Nyai Hj. Ummi Hafilda Ali: Leader of the Makassar Darul Quran Islamic Boarding School.
- 2. Nyai Hj. Sitti Syarifah Anwar: Leader of the An-Nisa Gowa Islamic Boarding School.
- 3. Nyai Hj. Masrufah Syam: Leader of Al-Misbah Bone Islamic Boarding School
- 4. Nyai Hj. Aisyah Zahra Makkalu: Leader of the Annida Maros Islamic Boarding School.
- 5. Nyai Hj. Rosmini Wahab: Leader of the Bina Insan Mandiri Sinjai Islamic Boarding School.
- 6. Nyai Hj. Nurdinah Anwar: Leader of Al-Muqorrobin Pinrang Islamic Boarding School.
- 7. Nyai Hj. Siti Qomariah: Leader of the Al-Hikmah Bulukumba Islamic Boarding School.
- 8. Nyai Hj. Nurul Huda: Leader of Al-Falah Takalar Islamic Boarding School.
- 9. Nyai Hj. Umm Kulsum: Leader of the Al-Islam Islamic Boarding School in Bulukumba.
- 10. Nyai Hj. Nur Asma: Leader of Al-Hidayah Parepare Islamic Boarding School
- 11. Nyai Hj. Nuriyah Wahid: Leader of the Makassar Al-Azhar Islamic Boarding School.
- 12. Nyai Hj. Lutfi Andriani: Leader of the As-Salam Pattallassang Islamic Boarding School.
- 13. Nyai Hj. Siti Halimah Tanda: Leader of the As-Syafi'iyah Palopo Islamic Boarding School.
- 14. Nyai Hj. Siti Mariam: Leader of Al-Ikhlas Jeneponto Islamic Boarding School.
- 15. Nyai Hj. Nurul Aisyah: Leader of the Darul Aitam Sengkang Islamic Boarding School.

Based on data collected from a variety of sources regarding women's leadership in Islamic boarding institutions in South Sulawesi, the preceding provides support for women's participation in various aspects of life. In South Sulawesi, the activities of female *pesantren* leaders are extremely diverse and dependent on each *pesantren*. In South Sulawesi, however, female leaders of Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role in administering the *pesantren* and guiding the students (Purkon, 2021). They are responsible for preserving Islamic traditions and heritage, teaching the Koran, hadith, fiqh, interpretation, and other religious sciences, and creating educational and religious programs. Although it was determined that the important role of women as *pesantren* leaders has not been fully recognized, because the *pesantren* headers remains significant. Therefore, the highest level of policy remains in the control of men. In addition, it was discovered that several *pesantren* that had been founded

and established previously are no longer active and that there are still a number of women-led *pesantren* that have not been adequately documented.

In South Sulawesi, the relationship between Bissu and *pesantren* is complex and fluctuates based on the historical and cultural context of each region (Ridhwan et al., 2018). In general, the Bissu and the *Pesantren* family are two groups with vastly different religious beliefs and practices, but they also share some spiritual perspectives and practices. Multiple regions in South Sulawesi demonstrate that Bissu and *pesantren* families coexist and frequently interact in daily life. Bissu are revered as spiritual leaders in the local culture and play a vital role in preserving the community's social and spiritual equilibrium.

In South Sulawesi, the *pesantren's* perspective on Bissu and its traditions can vary depending on the historical and cultural context of each region (Bruinessen, 2012). However, *pesantren* families frequently communicate a variety of perspectives regarding Bissu and their traditions. Some *pesantren* families see religious practices and local beliefs, including Bissu practices, as something that is contrary to the teachings of Islam. This view stems primarily from a literal interpretation of Islamic teachings and a tendency to regard local practices as a form of shirk or idol worship. There are *pesantren* families who are more open to local beliefs and see Bissu as spiritual leaders in local culture who have an important role in maintaining the social and spiritual balance of society. *Pesantren* families who share this view tend to integrate elements of local beliefs in their religious practices and assume that Islamic teachings and local beliefs and seek to promote a broader understanding of local culture and beliefs. The group tries to reduce misunderstandings and increase tolerance between local religious and belief groups.

The success of bissu in preserving cultural existence cannot be separated from three factors: consistency in performing ceremonial rituals, regeneration, and community support. In addition, all applicable bissu norms are translated according to the requirements of the current era. Therefore, the bissu culture has survived to the present day.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that woman have begun to take on leadership roles in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in South Sulawesi, signaling an opening for female participation in religious education and development. However, despite the presence of women in leadership positions, the cultural context remains heavily influenced by patriarchal structures. This social system continues to prioritize male dominance in various aspects of life, including within religious institutions. The research reveals that while women have found space to contribute within *pesantren*, their roles are still constrained by these entrenched cultural norms. One of the key strengths of this research is its in-depth exploration of the influence of Bissu figures on the acceptance of women as leaders in Islamic boarding schools. The study effectively connects the spiritual and ceremonial significance of Bissu in Bugis-Makassar's society with the gradual acceptance of female leadership in religious contexts. By examining how the Bissu's representation of female characteristics in traditional ceremonies has influenced broader societal acceptance of women in leadership roles, the research provides valuable insights into the cultural dynamics that shape gender roles within South Sulawesi's *pesantren*.

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. One major limitation is the focus on the cultural and religious context of South Sulawesi, which may not be fully generalizable to other regions with different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, while the research sheds light on the presence of women in leadership roles, it also highlights that women's authority in making the highest policy decisions within *pesantren* remains limited. Future research could benefit from a more detailed exploration of these limitations, including a broader analysis of how similar dynamics might play out in other regions and contexts, as well as a deeper investigation into the factors that continue to restrict women's full leadership autonomy within Islamic boarding schools.

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