

Preservation of Bugis Ethnic Customs in Palu City Through Oral Literature: A Study in Literary Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the forms, uncover the meanings, and explain the strategies employed to maintain the customs of the Bugis ethnic community in Palu City through oral literature, using a literary anthropology approach combined with an ethnographic method. The research was conducted in two Bugis settlement and trading centers, namely Pasar Inpres Manonda and Pasar Masomba, through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving sanro (ritual leaders), traditional figures, and participants of customary ceremonies. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, combined with oral-literary text analysis comprising transcription, structural identification, and meaning interpretation. The findings reveal that the maintenance of Bugis customs in Palu City is realized through three forms of oral literature displaying the structure of rites of passage (separation, liminal, and incorporation), namely the mabbaca doang ritual, the mappacci ritual, and elong recitation. These three forms embody the cultural values of reso, lempu', siri' na pesse, and getteng, which are symbolically interpreted through material elements such as four-colored sokko rice and pacci leaves, as well as metaphorical diction in the utterances. The strategies employed to maintain these customs include family- and diaspora-community-based value transmission, contextual adaptation of rituals with Islamic teachings through barasanji and mapenretemme, and the appropriation of digital media together with the Kerukunan Keluarga Sulawesi Selatan (KKSS) community association. These findings confirm that oral literature functions both as a medium and a marker of ethnic boundary, enabling the Bugis community to maintain its customs amid the multiethnic society of Palu City without withdrawing from cross-ethnic interaction with the Kaili people as the local indigenous population.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a multiethnic and multicultural nation, possesses a rich heritage of oral traditions distributed across nearly every ethnic group that constitutes its population. Among these diverse ethnic groups, the Bugis are widely recognized as one of the ethnic communities in the Indonesian archipelago with a particularly prominent tradition of migration, known as *sompe*. The migration of the Bugis to various regions represents not merely a physical movement in search of livelihood, but also the transfer of value systems, oral expressions, and customary practices that continue to be preserved in their new settlements. Palu City, as one of the centers of economic and governmental growth in Central Sulawesi, is one of the significant destinations for Bugis migration; however, this community has received relatively limited in-depth scholarly attention to date [1].

According to the 2010 Population Census, the Bugis were recorded as one of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, with a population of more than three million people distributed across various provinces outside South Sulawesi, including Central Sulawesi [2]. Unfortunately, up-to-date official data concerning the size and specific distribution of the Bugis community in Palu City are not yet available. Therefore, field research is necessary to directly map the actual conditions of the community.

The process of acculturation to the local Kaili culture, which continues to actively preserve its own customary rituals, such as the *balia tampilangi* ritual [3], together with modernization and shifting orientations among younger generations of Bugis people who were born and raised in migrant communities, may potentially weaken their attachment to ancestral customs. Bugis customs, which were historically transmitted from generation to generation through oral practices, now face the threat of extinction if systematic preservation efforts are not undertaken. In this context, oral literature occupies a strategic position because, without the accompanying oral expressions such as prayers, incantations, and traditional advice, a customary ritual becomes merely a sequence of movements without a shared meaning that can be collectively understood. Even in Palu City itself, oral traditions such as *mabbaca doang* are still practiced by the Bugis community in Kabonena Village, Ulujadi District [4]. This demonstrates that the subject of this study constitutes a living tradition that can still be directly observed and analyzed.

A number of studies have confirmed that oral literature plays an important role in shaping and strengthening regional cultural identity, while also serving as a means of preserving language and local cultural identity amid rapid social change [5]. However, most of these studies have focused on the functions of oral literature in its region of origin, particularly South Sulawesi. Similar functions within Bugis communities in migrant settings, which face dual pressures of acculturation, namely, the forces of urbanization and intensive interaction with the Kaili culture as the indigenous culture of the area, have received relatively little scholarly attention, particularly within the specific context of Palu City [6].

To examine the relationship between oral texts, cultural values, and the social contexts of their speakers, this study employs a literary anthropology approach, which views oral literature as a cultural phenomenon that cannot be separated from the social

system in which it is produced and transmitted. Through this approach, the central concern of the study is not merely “what forms of Bugis oral literature exist in Palu,” but rather “how oral literature functions as a social instrument,” namely as a medium for intergenerational transmission of values, a marker of ethnic identity boundaries within a pluralistic society, and a cultural strategy for negotiating the pressures of acculturation.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to: (1) describe the forms of oral literature used as a medium for preserving Bugis customs in Palu City by examining their structures and the stages of the rituals associated with them; (2) reveal the meanings of Bugis customs embedded in such oral literature from the perspectives of literary anthropology and local wisdom; and (3) describe the strategies employed by the Bugis community in Palu City to utilize oral literature in maintaining their customary practices amid social change, particularly from the perspectives of ethnic identity and acculturation.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, as it aimed to explore cultural phenomena holistically and contextually rather than measure them numerically [7]. Specifically, the study adopted a literary anthropology approach supported by ethnographic methods, through which Bugis oral literature such as *elong*, prayers, and advice expressed in traditional ceremonies was examined as a cultural document that records the collective value system and worldview of its supporting community [8]. At the same time, these forms of oral literature were understood within the context of the community’s everyday life through field observations [9].

The research was conducted at two residential areas and major Bugis trading centers in Palu City, namely Inpres Manonda Market, located in Balaroa Village, West Palu District, and Masomba Market, located in North Tatura Village, South Palu District. The research data consisted of oral literary expressions, the structures and stages of traditional rituals, the cultural values and local wisdom embedded within them, and patterns of cross-ethnic social interaction between the Bugis and Kaili communities. These data were analyzed using the theory of ethnic identity and social boundaries [10], as well as acculturation theory [11]. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations involving informants selected through purposive sampling, including *sanro* (ritual practitioners), traditional leaders, and individuals involved in and participating in traditional ceremonies. Secondary data consisted of relevant documents, photographs, recordings, and scholarly literature.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. A recording-listening-note-taking technique was specifically employed to document oral literary expressions. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [12]. Prior to this process, the oral literary texts were analyzed through transcription, structural identification, and interpretation of meaning [13]. Data validity was established through source, technique, and time triangulation [14].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Oral Literature as a Medium for Preserving Customary Practices

Table 1. Forms of Oral Literature as a Medium for Preserving Bugis Customs in Palu City

No.	Form of Oral Literature	Structure of Utterances and Ritual Stages
1	<i>Mabbaca Doang</i>	<i>Taro-taro doang, doang mattemmu, doang barakka</i> . Stages: separation (purification and presentation of offerings at <i>kampurung</i>) – liminal stage (prayers recited by the <i>sanro</i> in front of four-colored <i>sokko</i>) – reintegration (collective <i>manggandre</i> /communal eating).
2	<i>Mappacci</i>	<i>Packing lipu, pattettong pasapu, passolo</i> . Stages: separation (the bride is isolated in the <i>paddemnuang</i>) – liminal stage (application of <i>pacci</i> accompanied by the recitation of <i>Pau-pau riolo</i>) – reintegration (removal of the <i>pacci</i> and the <i>Mappasikarawa</i> prayer).
3	<i>Elong</i> Recitation	Rhyming poetry consisting of 8–7–6 syllables (<i>Padduppa, Paseng, Pamatte</i>). Stages: separation (the reciter sits in a circle) – liminal stage (recitation accompanied by the <i>kecapi</i> , a traditional lute) – reintegration (the transmission of advice to younger generations).

The three forms of oral literature demonstrate a relatively consistent structural pattern, namely separation, liminality, and reintegration, as commonly found in rites of passage [15]. Particularly during the liminal stage, oral utterances become an element that provides verbal meaning to the movements and symbols performed. Thus, without the recitation of *doang* or traditional advice, the *mabbaca doang* and *mappacci* ceremonies would lose their customary legitimacy in the eyes of the communities that sustain them. Compared with [16] findings concerning *mabbaca doang* in Kabonena Village, which highlight a shift in its implementation from a centralized setting to individual households, this study finds that the structure of the utterances themselves has remained relatively preserved, despite differences in the locations where the rituals are performed between Inpres Manonda Market and Masomba Market. What has shifted is not the structural form of the oral literature, but rather the spatial context of its implementation. This pattern confirms that the essence of the customary practice is maintained, while its outward form adapts to the urban and multiethnic context.

Meanings of Customary Practices Embedded in Oral Literature

The symbolic interpretation of the four-colored *sokko*, *pacci* leaves, and metaphorical diction in *elong* demonstrates that the Bugis community in Palu City interprets the material and textual elements of its rituals through multiple layers of meaning, consistent with Geertz's concept of thick description [17]. Each symbol points to an interconnected network of values—*reso*, *lemphu'*, *siri' na pesse*, and *getteng* which collectively constitute the Bugis philosophy of life. This finding reinforces the view that traditional oral expressions function as concise and effective representations of a cultural value system [18]. In comparison with the findings of Syarifah and Mushthoza [19], which

primarily associate *mappacci* with purity and honesty, this study identifies a more prominent reinforcement of *siri' na pesse* within the migrant context. This is because Bugis families in Palu face additional pressures to demonstrate family honor and maintain social dignity within a multiethnic society in which they are perceived as a migrant community.

Table 2. Symbolic Meanings and Customary Values in Bugis Oral Literature in Palu City

No.	Form	Symbolic Interpretation and Customary Values
1	<i>Mabbaca Doang</i>	The four-colored <i>sokko</i> (red, white, yellow, and black) symbolizes the four elements constituting human beings. Customary values: <i>reso</i> (hard work) and <i>lempu'</i> (honesty).
2	<i>Mappacci</i>	The <i>pacci</i> leaves symbolize purity, while the seven-layered sarong symbolizes mental resilience. Customary values: <i>siri' na pesse</i> (self-respect and empathy).
3	<i>Elong</i> Recitation	Metaphorical diction (<i>pabura</i> = medicine; <i>pasi kalacing</i> = adhesive/bonding agent) symbolizes moral guidance and principles for maintaining identity in migrant settings. Customary value: <i>getteng</i> (steadfastness in principle).

Strategies for Preserving Customs through Oral Literature

Based on the field data, three complementary strategies for preserving customary practices were identified. First, family- and migrant-community-based transmission involves the reintroduction of the Bugis language and the recitation of *elong* into domestic spaces, where they are orally taught by *sanro* and traditional leaders to younger generations during family rituals. Second, contextual adaptation of rituals through the integration of Islamic teachings is reflected in the incorporation of Bugis oral literature into the recitation of *barzanji* or *mapenretemme* (Qur'an completion ceremonies) [20]. This integration enables traditional oral expressions to remain compatible with local religious traditions without eliminating the fundamental value of *siri' na pesse*. Third, the appropriation of digital media and community associations is manifested through the digital recording and documentation of *mappacci* and *mabbaca bolla* rituals, which are uploaded by young Bugis people in Palu through digital platforms, as well as through *elong* performances at the annual programs of the South Sulawesi Family Association (*Kerukunan Keluarga Sulawesi Selatan*—KKSS) in Central Sulawesi [21].

These three strategies can be understood as forms of reinforcement of ethnic identity boundaries, as proposed by Zulkarnain et al. [22], in which such boundaries are maintained not through isolation but through cultural markers that continue to be reproduced in everyday interactions with the Kaili ethnic group and other communities in market environments. This represents the revitalization of cultural symbols by a minority group as a means of affirming its presence in public spaces [23]. Meanwhile, the contextual adaptation of Bugis oral literature to Islamic teachings demonstrates a pattern of integration as formulated by Rustinaa and Nurdin [24], namely an acculturation strategy that enables migrant communities to maintain their original cultural identity while

simultaneously participating actively in the religious life of the host society. This pattern differs from the findings of Aرسال [25], which emphasize the preservation of Bugis culture through physical artifacts, particularly house architecture. In Palu City, by contrast, cultural integration takes place primarily at the level of oral expressions and religious practices, which are more fluid and adaptable to the dynamics of a multiethnic urban environment. This process reflects the revitalization of cultural symbols by minority groups as a means of affirming their presence in public spaces. The significance of such cultural reproduction can also be related to the use of poetry and literary practices as educational and cultural media. Tahir et al. [26] demonstrate the potential of gamified strategies, particularly Snakes and Ladders, to support poetry writing in language learning, while Tahir et al. [27] highlight the role of poetry collections in documenting and expressing cultural values through literary works.

Furthermore, Ulinsa et al. [28] show the importance of language, culture, and politeness in directive speech acts within the Lauje community, illustrating how cultural identity and social norms are communicated through everyday linguistic interactions. These perspectives support an understanding of oral expressions and literary practices as important means of sustaining cultural identity and transmitting social values across communities. Meanwhile, the contextual adaptation of Bugis oral literature to Islamic teachings demonstrates a pattern of cultural integration in which migrant communities maintain their cultural identity while actively participating in the religious life of the host society. This integration can also be examined through educational approaches that connect literature with local ecological and cultural contexts. Agustan [29], for example, explore the Environmental Case Method in poetry learning through an ethnoecological literature perspective, emphasizing the relevance of contextual cultural environments in literary education. Their findings provide a useful comparative perspective for understanding how cultural meanings can be preserved and reinterpreted through literary practices. Unlike approaches that emphasize cultural preservation primarily through physical artifacts, such as traditional house architecture, the Bugis community in Palu City demonstrates how cultural continuity may also operate through oral expressions, linguistic interactions, poetic traditions, and religious practices. These forms of cultural expression are relatively fluid and adaptable, enabling cultural identity to be maintained while facilitating participation in a multiethnic urban environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the preservation of Bugis customs in Palu City is manifested through three forms of oral literature that reflect the structure of rites of passage—separation, liminality, and reintegration—namely the *mabbaca doang* ritual, the *mappacci* ritual, and the recitation of *elong*. These three forms embody the customary values of *reso*, *lempu'*, *siri' na pesse*, and *getteng*, which are symbolically expressed through material elements such as four-colored *sokko* and *pacci* leaves, as well as through metaphorical diction in oral expressions. The strategies employed by the Bugis community to preserve their customs include family- and migrant-community-based transmission of cultural values, contextual adaptation of rituals to

Islamic teachings, and the appropriation of digital media and the KKSS community association. These findings confirm that oral literature functions both as a medium and as a marker of ethnic identity boundaries, enabling the Bugis community to preserve its customs within the multiethnic society of Palu City without withdrawing from cross-ethnic social interactions with the Kaili ethnic group as the indigenous population of the area.

This study has several limitations, particularly restricted access to sacred oral expressions and its geographical scope, which was limited to two Bugis residential enclaves in Palu City. Therefore, the generalization of these findings to Bugis communities in other migrant regions should be undertaken with caution. Future research is recommended to expand the geographical scope of the study and to utilize these findings as teaching materials for local-content curricula in Indonesian Language and Literature education.

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