



PRESTIGE IN THE BUGIS COMMUNITY: WHY CAN'T GOLD JEWELLERY IN BUGIS WOMEN SHIFT SOCIAL STATUS?

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ABSTRACT. The Bugis people have a social stratification system that is inherited from generation to generation, where a person's social status is determined more by genealogical factors compared to the accumulation of material wealth. This study aims to analyse the relationship between descent and social status in the Bugis community and explore how gold jewellery functions as a symbol of prestige for women. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi. This study applies triangulation techniques by combining in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as time triangulation, to avoid temporal bias. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman approach through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results of the study show that in the Bugis community, the social stratification system is still based on lineage, while gold functions more as a status symbol for those who already have a certain social position, rather than as a tool of social mobility. The symbolism of gold jewellery is subject to established social structures, so the prestige gained through gold is not strong enough to shift the social stratification that has been inherited.

Keywords: Bugis; social status; prestige; gold jewelry; descendants

INTRODUCTION

The Bugis people have a strong social stratification system and have been inherited from generation to generation. In this community, a person's social status is generally determined by hereditary factors and family lineage (Caldwell & Wellen, 2016). Descendants of nobility often have a higher position compared to ordinary people (Henley & Caldwell, 2008). In social life, a person's identity and status are seen in various aspects of culture, including in the ownership and use of gold jewellery (Bourdieu, 2010). Gold jewellery not only functions as decoration but also as a symbol of prestige that reflects the social position of its owner. However, although gold has high economic and symbolic value, gold ownership cannot change or improve the social strata of women in the Bugis community. This shows that the social stratification system in Bugis society is more dependent on genealogical factors than material accumulation.

Previous studies have discussed various aspects related to gold jewellery and social status in Bugis society. First, research on Bugis social stratification emphasises that heredity is the major element in determining a person's status, as found in social anthropological studies on South Sulawesi society

(Yusriadi et al., 2019). Second, research on the symbolism of jewellery in Bugis culture shows that gold functions as a marker of identity, wedding gifts, and family investment but is not strong enough to change the existing social structure (Jumiyati et al., 2024; Yunus, 2012). Third, studies on gender and prestige in Bugis society highlight how women use gold jewellery to show their social class in social interactions, although their position in the social hierarchy still depends on their family origins (Latief, 2016; Ramli & Basri, 2021).

However, these studies have not specifically examined why gold, despite its high economic and symbolic value, still cannot shift the social status of Bugis women. Previous studies have focused more on the function of gold as a symbol of identity and an expression of prestige but have not discussed in depth the social mechanisms that cause gold to have no transformative power over established social structures. Therefore, this study offers a new contribution by exploring the limitations of gold as a tool for social mobility in the Bugis community, as well as revealing how the system of cultural values and norms maintains social stratification based on descent.

Based on social reality and findings in previous studies, this study aims to examine more deeply the relationship between descent and social status in the Bugis community and how gold jewellery functions as a social symbol for Bugis women. This study also explores how gold jewellery reflects women's prestige in their community and why, even though gold has high symbolic and economic value, it still cannot change a person's social position. By examining these factors, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social dynamics in the Bugis community, especially about the role of women, the symbolism of jewellery, and hereditary social stratification.

This study is based on the assumption that the social system in the Bugis community is still strongly influenced by genealogical factors, which are more dominant in determining social status compared to the ownership of material wealth such as gold jewellery. In addition, it is assumed that gold jewellery functions more than a status enhancer for those who already have a certain social position, rather than as a tool for social mobility for groups from lower strata. Another assumption is that although gold can influence social interaction, the symbolism attached to gold jewellery in Bugis society remains subject to the social structure that is inherited from generation to generation (Mukhlis P et al., 1995). Therefore, this study attempts to prove that in the Bugis community, the prestige obtained from gold ownership is not strong enough to change the social structure that is already embedded in their culture and traditions.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative study aimed at understanding prestige in the Bugis community in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi. This study was conducted in three sub-districts, namely Tanasitolo, Belawa, and Tempe. The selection of this location was based on initial data obtained that in the three locations, many Bugis women used gold jewellery. Informants comprised women who used gold and their husbands. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, with question guidelines that explored community perceptions of prestige in the Bugis community which were associated with the phenomenon of the use of gold jewellery among Bugis women. Primary data were obtained directly from informants, while secondary data came from books, journals, and scientific articles. In this study, triangulation was used to increase data validity by comparing information obtained from various sources and methods. Source triangulation was carried out by confirming data from various informants, such as women who used gold and their husbands, to see the

consistency of the answers. Technical triangulation was applied by combining in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained. Time triangulation was also used by collecting data at different periods to avoid temporal bias. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique in this study used thematic analysis based on the Miles & Huberman (2014) approach, which includes three main stages: (1) data reduction, where data from interviews, observations, and documentation are selected, categorised, and simplified according to the focus of the research; (2) data presentation, namely organising data as descriptive narratives or matrices to facilitate further analysis; and (3) drawing conclusions and verification, where patterns, themes, and relationships in the data are interpreted to answer research questions and reconfirmed to ensure the validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descent and Social Status in the Bugis Community

In the Bugis Wajo community, lineage still plays an important role in determining a person's social strata. The social stratification system inherited from old traditions divides society into three main strata: *Arung* (high nobility), *To sama* (commoners), and *Ata* (formerly slaves, now lower social class). Descendants of nobility, especially from royal families, are still respected and often receive privileges in various aspects of life, including local customs and government. Titles such as *Datu*, *Petta*, and *Bau page* reflect a person's social status in the societal hierarchy. In marriage, noble families maintain their lineage by marrying within the *Arung* to maintain their social strata. Although modernization has brought changes in social values and norms, descendants of nobility still have greater access to education, economics, and politics, allowing them to maintain their influence in Wajo society. Table 1 describes lineage and social strata in the Bugis community.

Table 1. Descent and Social Status in the Bugis Community

Aspects	Description
The Role of Lineage	The Wajo people still uphold the social stratification system based on lineage. The descendants of the nobility (<i>Arung</i>) still have an honorable position and often receive respect in traditional activities and local government.
Social Stratification	The Wajo people are traditionally divided into three main layers: 1. <i>Arung</i> (high nobility), descendants of the royal family who have privileges in the customary system and government. 2. <i>To Sama</i> (ordinary people), a socially and economically free society, can participate in various sectors of life without hereditary

Aspects	Description
	restrictions. 3. <i>Ata</i> (former slaves, now lower social layers), used to be a group bound in the slavery system, although this system has been abolished, the influence of this status is still felt in certain social aspects.
Title of Nobility in Wajo Society	The Bugis Wajo people have a noble title that reflects a person's social status based on lineage. <i>Datu</i> , the highest title given to children who are prepared to become kings or main leaders. <i>Petta</i> , a title for the nobles of the <i>Ana' Karaeng</i> layer whose noble blood has faded but is still respected. <i>Bau</i> ', a title given to someone who is considered to be higher in rank than ordinary nobles. In addition, there is also the title <i>Andi</i> , a title used by the descendants of high nobility or royal families that is inherited from generation to generation to both men and women. Lastly, <i>Baso</i> or <i>Besse</i> is an honorary title for men (<i>Baso</i>) and women (<i>Besse</i>) who come from noble descendants. This title shows that the owner has noble blood, even though his degree is below <i>Datu</i> or <i>Andi</i> , but is still respected in the noble environment of Bugis Wajo.
The Influence of Social Status on Marriage	Marriages in the Wajo community often consider bloodline. Marriages between nobles were still respected, and some noble families preferred to marry fellow descendants of the raft in order to maintain social status.
Changes in Values and Norms	Modernisation has changed the way society views social status, especially with the increasing role of education and the economy in determining one's position. However, in some traditional communities, lineage remains the dominant factor in determining prestige.
Social Status Adaptation Strategies	The descendants of the nobility in Wajo who wanted to maintain their social status often chose the path of higher education or politics. Many of them have careers as academics, regional officials, or entrepreneurs to remain influential in society.
Prestige in the Modern Context	In the Wajo society, social status depends not only on lineage, but also on individual achievement in the fields of education, economics, and politics. However, those who come from noble bloodlines often have an easier time gaining access to resources and a wider social network.

The Bugis Wajo community still maintains a social stratification system based on lineage, where descendants of the nobility (*Arung*) still occupy an honourable position in society. This social structure is divided into three main layers: *Arung* the highest class who have special rights in customs and government, *To sama* ' as ordinary people who have social and economic freedom, and *Ata* who were formerly slaves and still experience the impact of low social status in several aspects of life. The identity of nobility is also strengthened through the use of titles such as *Datu* for candidates for the highest leader, *Petta* for nobles with fading blood, and *Bau page* for those who are considered higher than ordinary nobles. This system also influences marriage practices, where marriages between nobles are still

respected and often chosen to maintain the family's social status.

However, modernisation has brought about changes in the way the Wajo people view social status. Education and economic factors now play an increasingly important role in determining a person's position in society, although in traditional communities, lineage is still the major factor in determining prestige. This is related to symbolic capital, as stated by Bourdieu (1986) that besides economic capital (wealth), there is also social capital (networks and relationships) and cultural capital (education, academic degrees, and knowledge). Prestige often comes from this symbolic capital, which cannot be obtained simply through material wealth. For example, someone who is wealthy but does not have a distinguished family background or higher education may still be considered lower in the social hierarchy than those with strong symbolic capital.

Many descendants of the nobility have adapted to the changing times by pursuing higher education or engaging in politics and business to maintain their influence. In the modern context, access to resources and social networks remains easier for those from noble families, so that despite changes in the social stratification system, hereditary inheritance still provides its advantages in various aspects of social, economic, and political life in Wajo.

Wealth is dynamic and can change over time, but heredity is more stable because it is passed down from generation to generation (De Nardi, 2004). Someone who is materially wealthy but has just gained their wealth (*nouveau riche*) still has difficulty gaining the same social recognition as families who have had high status for centuries (Korom, 2022).

Gold Jewelry for Bugis Community Women as a Social Symbol

Gold jewellery has a deep meaning in the lives of Bugis women, not only as a beauty accessory but also as a symbol of social class, wealth, and cultural identity. In Bugis society, gold is often inherited from generation to generation, reflecting the family's position and the owner's honour. Using gold jewellery is also closely related to customary values and social stratification systems, where women with more gold or with certain distinctive designs are often associated with a higher social class. In addition, gold jewellery is part of social expression in various traditional rituals, weddings, and other important events, emphasising the role of women in maintaining tradition and showing family prestige.

Table 2. The Relationship Between Bugis Women and Gold Jewelry

Aspects	Description
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Traditional Meaning	Gold jewelry symbolises the social class, family honor, and economic position of Bugis women. It is generally worn by noble women as a marker of their social class.
Usage in Customary	It is used in wedding ceremonies, traditional celebrations, and family events as a symbol of dignity and prosperity. Noble women tend to wear more gold jewelry to show their family status.
Economic Symbols	Indicates the economic well-being of the owner. Families who can afford to give large amounts of gold jewelry to their daughters are considered to have high economic status.
Meaning in Marriage	Gold jewelry is often used as a <i>passiko</i> ’ (dowry) in Bugis weddings. The greater the amount of gold given, the higher the bride’s social class in the eyes of the public.
Changes in the Modern Context	The use of gold jewelry was no longer limited to noble women. Today, women from all walks of life also wear gold as part of their lifestyle and economic investments. In some cases, gold jewelry is used more as a symbol of personal achievement than family status.

Gold jewellery in the Bugis community has a deep meaning as a social symbol that reflects the status, honour, and economy of women. Traditionally, gold jewellery is worn by women from the nobility to emphasise their social class (Clark, 1986). In Bugis customs, gold is used in various important events, such as weddings, family celebrations, and other traditional ceremonies. Noble women wear large amounts of gold jewellery as a representation of the dignity and prosperity of their families. In addition, gold also functions as an economic symbol, where families who can provide large amounts of jewellery to their daughters are considered to have high economic status (Millar, 1983). In marriage, gold acts as a *passiko*’ or dowry, where the greater the amount of gold given, the higher the social status of a bride in Bugis society (Basri & Fikri, 2018).

As time goes by, the meaning of gold jewellery in the Bugis community has changed. If previously gold functioned more than a symbol of family status, now its use is no longer limited to the nobility. Women from all social statuses wore gold, both as part of their lifestyle and as a form of economic investment. Globalisation and modernisation have brought changes in the design and function of gold jewellery, so Bugis women choose more practical models without abandoning cultural elements (Spyer, 2000). Sometimes, gold is now used more as a symbol of personal achievement than as a marker of a family’s social standing (Zelizer, 2021). This reflects the social dynamics that continue to develop, where the identity of Bugis women is increasingly shaped by factors of individualism and economic independence.

Gold jewellery is a social symbol for Bugis women because it has a meaning attached to the economic, cultural, and customary aspects that have

been passed down from generation to generation. In Bugis society, gold is not only valuable as a valuable item but also as an indicator of social class. The more and heavier the gold worn, the higher the economic status and social influence of the wearer in the community (Yulindasari et al., 2024). In addition, gold jewellery also reflects the cultural identity and honour of the family. In various traditional events, such as weddings and other ceremonies, Bugis women wear gold jewellery as a symbol of their nobility and readiness to carry out their social roles as wives and mothers (Rosmita, 2022). Gold jewellery also functions as an investment and family inheritance, showing the role of women in maintaining the economic welfare of the family.

The phenomenon of gold jewellery as a social symbol for Bugis women occurs because of the existence of a cultural value system that places gold as a representation of social class, family honour, and economic investment. In Bugis society, gold is used in various aspects of life, especially in marriage, where gold is part of the dowry (*dui menre*’), which shows a man’s economic ability and respect for the woman’s family (Basri & Fikri, 2018; Rosmita, 2022). In addition, gold jewellery is passed down from generation to generation as a family investment that strengthens economic stability and continuity of tradition (Satria, 2016). Therefore, the value system that develops in Bugis society makes gold more than just jewellery; it is also a social identity that strengthens the position of women in their community.

Bugis Women's Prestige and the Inability of Gold Jewelry to Change Social Status

In Bugis society, women who wear gold jewellery are often seen as individuals with high social status and come from respected families. Gold is a symbol of prestige that reflects the welfare, dignity, and honour of the family. However, although gold has high economic value and can show a person’s wealth, its existence cannot change the social status in Bugis society, which is still heavily influenced by the social stratification system based on descent.

Table 3. Prestige of Bugis Women	
Aspects	Description
Traditional Meaning of Prestige	The prestige of Bugis women is still greatly influenced by lineage, education, and social contribution. Women of noble descent, especially those with the title of <i>Datu</i> , <i>Arung</i> , or <i>Petta</i> , remained respected. Their status is more recognized than women from ordinary social strata (<i>To Maradeka</i>).
The Role of Gold Jewelry	Gold jewelry is a symbol of economic prosperity in the Bugis community in Wajo, especially in traditional events such as weddings and family parties. However, gold only strengthens existing status, not as a means of social mobility to move to a higher aristocratic status.

Aspects	Description
Limitations in Social Mobility	Even though a woman had a lot of gold jewelry, she still couldn't rise to the social strata of nobility if she wasn't from a noble lineage. The Bugis social stratification system still has a strong influence in the Wajo community, so lineage remains the main factor in determining social status.
Changes in the Modern Context	Women in Wajo from various walks of life wear gold not only as a symbol of family status, but also as a form of economic investment. However, in indigenous communities that are still strong, lineage is still more respected than material wealth in determining women's social prestige.

Based on the findings of this study, the prestige of Bugis women in Wajo still depends heavily on lineage, education, and social contribution. Women of noble descent, such as those with the title *Datu*, *Arung*, or *Petta* still receive higher respect than those from ordinary social strata (*To Maradeka*). In Bugis society, a person's social status is determined by a strong social stratification system, where noble descent is the major factor in determining a person's position in the social hierarchy. As Weber (1978) emphasised, social status depends not only on the economy but also on factors of honour and hereditary inheritance. The concept of status group in his theory shows that elite groups (such as Bugis nobles) have inherited honour, which cannot be replaced by material accumulation such as gold. Social status in traditional societies is often closed, so social mobility is very limited, except through mechanisms recognized by the social system (for example, marriage with noble descendants). Despite changes in the modern context, lineage remains the main symbol that distinguishes noble women from ordinary women in the traditional communities of Wajo.

In addition, gold jewellery in Bugis culture has a meaning as a symbol of economic prosperity, especially in traditional events such as weddings and family parties. However, gold ownership cannot be used as a tool for social mobility to move to a higher noble status. Women who come from ordinary backgrounds still cannot reach the nobility just by having a large amount of gold. In the modern context, gold is indeed used as an investment by women from various social strata, but in traditional communities that are still strong, material wealth cannot replace lineage in determining social prestige.

Gold jewellery worn by women symbolises social class. However, the ability of gold jewellery to change one's social status is limited. Social stratification in Bugis culture is traditionally based on lineage and family status, which divides society into three main strata: *Ana' Arung* (nobles), *To Maradeka* (free people), and *Ata* (slaves). Although gold ownership can increase an individual's prestige

within their social class, gold cannot change the social status that has been determined by descent. Thus, gold jewellery functions more as a status marker within the existing social class than as a tool for social mobility.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that in the Bugis community, social prestige is not solely determined by the ownership of gold jewelry, but is more related to lineage and social role in society. Although gold can function as a symbol of wealth and cultural identity, it does not have the power to shift the genealogically based social stratification system. The descendants of the nobility (*Arung*) still receive respect and privileges in various aspects of life, while the common people (*To sama*) and the lower social class (*Ata*) have limitations in obtaining higher social status. Thus, this study confirms that the social system of the Bugis community still maintains a traditional hierarchy, despite social and economic changes. The results of this study have implications for a deeper understanding of social dynamics in traditional communities in Indonesia. This study confirms that social symbols in society are not static, but experience changes that are still influenced by inherited cultural values. In addition, this study provides insights into social and educational policies in the Bugis community, especially related to the importance of education and social roles as determinants of social status beyond descent. This study has several limitations. First, this study was only conducted in three sub-districts in Wajo Regency, so the results cannot be generalised to the entire Bugis community in South Sulawesi. Second, this study focuses more on women who use gold and their partners, so perspectives from other social groups may not be fully represented. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted with a wider coverage area and a quantitative approach to measure the influence of various social factors on prestige in the Bugis community.

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