Vernacular Architecture of Buginese:  
The Concept of Local-Wisdom in Constructing Buildings Based on Human Anatomy

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Abstract:  
Purpose: Several studies have been conducted on the concept of Bugis community house construction to understand its macro- and micro-cosmology. This study was, however, conducted to complement the multi-perception research on the relationship between architecture and local wisdom by disclosing the formation of residential space plans. This involved the use of the Bugis house as the subject and the application of the horizontal and vertical philosophies’ perspectives based on the anatomical dimensions of a lying human body as its traditional architectural uniqueness. Research Design & Methodology: The study was conducted qualitatively in Talungeng Village, Bone Regency, Indonesia, for a period of one year, 2018–2019, using the case study approach, phenomenology, and ethnography model. Data were collected through several eligible informants and analyzed using the Discovering Cultural Themes method by associating studies with architecture. Results & Findings: This study showed the horizontal spatial organization and relations in the Bugis house plan derive from the philosophy and function of human body parts in a lying position, which is believed to be a means to provide protection and comfort for residents, while the vertical aspect involves the use of the house frame as the central pillar in proportion to the whole structure. The adoption of the human body as the framework is usually to provide mutual support for the building structure and to ensure it has enough strength to mitigate against earthquakes, floods, and strong winds.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bugis stage-type houses, one of which is located in Talungeng Village, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, have a unique development concept associated with the community, involving the adoption of both vertical and horizontal anatomical dimensions of the human body (Abidah, 2016). Historically, house structures of the stage type have been found in almost all parts of the world, including places with high rainfall, tropical climate conditions, and high humidity (Michiani & Asano, 2017). Moreover, the construction of stilt houses is part of the long history of several countries in Asia, notably in Southeast Asia and specifically in Indonesia, where the designs are classified based on two main categories: maritime and agricultural (Chen, Ariffin, & Wang, 2015; Michiani & Asano, 2017; Vongvilay et al., 2015). The dominance of these designs of the period was believed to be based

Several studies have been conducted by both local and foreign researchers on the traditional architecture of the Bugis house in relation to spatial planning, specifically, construction according to the understanding of vertical cosmology, structure, and other aspects (Abidah, 2016; Adams, 1984; Arifuddin, 2016; Ismail, 2012; Naing & Iskandar, 2015; Naing, Santosa, & Soemarno, 2011). However, only limited research has been conducted on the dimensions of the shape and size of these buildings based on the horizontal anatomy of the human body. For example, Mardanas’ (1985) book, discussed by Imriyanti, Wunas, and Arifin (2017) and Gambiro and Yamin (2018), reported that the vertical formation of a house is influenced by the structure of the cosmos and upper realm, as well as the middle of the lower domain. Moreover, further clarification by Mardanas of the realms showed the high part to consist of the holy places, the middle to be inhabited by humans, and the lower to host interaction with the surrounding environment. In line with this submission, Robinson and Paeni (2005), Ismail (2012), and Pelras (2003), while studying the Bugis tribal stage house, reported the belief of the community that the house is an embodiment of the human being standing vertically. Furthermore, the architectural space in these buildings has been reported to function as a storage area for rice or other agricultural products (Bugis: rakkeang) similar to the agrarian products recorded to have been stored in buildings of ancient Chinese architectural design (Tan, 2011). In the Bugis houses, however, they are associated with certain sacred values (Vongvilay et al., 2015).

The Bugis philosophy is established on the belief that the house is their eternal abode and every life activity, ranging from birth and marriage to death, is conducted in the building (Tang & Rahim, 2019; Graham, 2004). Therefore, the house is expected to be a reflection of the occupants. For example, Broadbent (1980), Howell (2013), Akil and Osman (2017), and Reed (2019) have reported the concept of space in a traditional or customary house to be a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017). This concept has been in operation for generations as a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017). This concept has been in operation for generations as a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017). This concept has been in operation for generations as a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017). This concept has been in operation for generations as a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017). This concept has been in operation for generations as a form of expression of identity and local cultural entities. This means the Bugis house, or Bola-Ugi, physically realized vertically on the stage as a form of local culture, reflects the natural conditions and culture of the Bugis people (Wasilah & Hidayanti, 2017; Naing, Hadi, & Djamereng, 2018; Artiningrum & Sukmajati, 2017).
The traditional architectural development of the Bugis house was reported to be based on the cosmology comprising of a vertical space including poles, holes, the body which is the residential space, and the roof (Abidah, 2016; Adams, 1984; Arifuddin, 2016; Ismail, 2012), while the horizontal aspect involves the floor plan which is the main space for inhabitation and a manifestation of physical space. This is in line with a previous comparative study conducted by Vongvilay et al. (2015) and further emphasized by Tan (2011) through research on ancient Chinese traditional houses which showed the living room/altar acts as an exhibition space to perform certain rituals. However, limited attention has been placed on the horizontal Bugis house plan, from the perspective of size and modules. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this research gap. The urgency of this study emphasized the importance of having adequate knowledge of Bugis tribal houses regarding the use of the horizontal perspective involving the body of the house, ale-bola, which is believed to be a sacred space to conduct several traditional ceremonial activities such as marriage ceremonies, birth initiations, and burial rites (Yunus, 2012). This study, therefore, objectively complements previous studies that have combined architecture, ethnography, and local wisdom.

2. RESEARCH AREA

The study was conducted in Talungeng Village, Barebbo District, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, covering an area of 6.80 km² and located on 4°35'12.3" South, 120°20'23.9" East with 276 households, a population of 1,164 people, and 171/km² denser than the average population density of Bone regency, which is the capital of the region. Talungeng Village has a homogeneous population structure dominated by the Bugis tribe; Bugis traditional houses are still mostly found in this village, as shown in Figure 1 and Appendix (Figure 9). Moreover, houses in this village are constructed cooperatively by Sanro-Bola considered to be experts in building with respect to the procedures, intricacies, and customs that have been prominently used for generations.

![Figure 1. Traditional Bugis House, Talungeng Village](image)
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Informant Criteria

The three primary informants in this study were Sanro-Bola with experience, skills, and expertise in building Bugis houses and recommended by the Talungeng Village head as well as the community and traditional leaders. It is, however, important to explain that a Sanro-Bola is an individual with the mastery of ritual/mystical matters attached to house construction, while the Panrita-Bola masters the technique of building the house. Therefore, the informants fall into these two categories as well as one for others in the community, such as the leaders, homeowners, and other stakeholders.

3.2 Materials and Measurement

An explorative and descriptive qualitative approach was used for analysis, while information was gathered using in-depth interview techniques through the application of the local Bugis language to determine the concept involved in the construction of traditional houses in Talungeng Village from a horizontal perspective or based on the anatomical aspect of the human body in the lying or sleeping position. The research was conducted between 2018 and mid-2019.

The interview results were recorded, rewritten, and interpreted for further analysis while the research observations, phenomics, and intelligent buildings explained in the introduction sub-section were combined with the interviews for discussions and to draw an appropriate conclusion. Moreover, a diagram showing the anatomical representation of a house was also used for analysis, as described in Section 4.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Horizontal Philosophy of Traditional Bugis Houses in Talungeng Village

The house reflects the beliefs of the Bugis community, relating all its components with the human body; for example, the human head is the roof/rakkeang, the body is the middle part/ale-bola, while the feet are the under part/awa-bola, thus composing a complete stilt-house. The philosophy of building a house on stilts has become a generational tradition for the Bugis; a more detailed understanding and expression of this concept exists in Talungeng compared to other villages.

“...many people build houses just by looking at the common structure and design such as the roofs, poles, and spaces. The other living conditions such as the cleanliness desired as requirements indicate the condition and habits of the owner. Likewise, while building a home in the Talungeng Village community, the inside needs to follow the shape of our body as a human with the head, mouth, and stomach.” (The informant, Village head and Sanro-Bola, 2018).

“Then ... a house cannot just be built any time by anyone, a lot of things are required to be agreed upon and followed because the house would be lived in until the end of life. The persons usually appointed
to determine the condition of the house later are Sanro-Bola because of their knowledge.” (Head of Talungeng Village, 2019).

Horizontally, the concept of a house in Talungeng is generally the same as that of the Bugis, which involves understanding life universally rather than from the ontological perspective. Moreover, the philosophy of life of the people is sulapa’-eppa’, which is translated as “self-improvement.” This means all aspects of human beings are expected to be perfect if formed from the four elements of water, earth, fire, and wind. This is reflected in the purposive interviews conducted with the residents which showed most of the Bugis stilt houses horizontally and vertically reflecting the philosophy of eppa’. Each house owner interviewed has an understanding of this concept and it is mostly applied at every stage house through the help of the Sanro-Bola.

“The most crucial thing in building the house, if we are Bugis people, is sulapa’ eppa’, which means that the home must be rectangular. Why rectangular? Because it represents the four elements that are the source of life, namely water, fire, and wind.” (Informant, Sanro-Bola, 2018)

“Eee.. not all of them are ball panrita sanro-bola, there is a lot of Panrita-Bola here (home architects), but they don’t understand the ritual in building a house. Well, those in charge of the rituals involved in building a home are Sanro-Bola. But ... almost all Sanro-Bola here master the technique of building homes, except the old ones because they no longer have the physical ability.” (Informant, Sanro-Bola, 2018)

The architecture of the Bugis Bone House has a broad meaning because they are not built only to be used as shelters from rain and the scorching heat of the sun but also in relation to the philosophical values and culture of the community. Several meanings and noble values integrated and contained in these houses are interpreted and held as views of experience in daily life and are inseparable from the local wisdom of the Bugis community in Talungeng Village. This local wisdom starts with the choice of orientation, the idea of where to place the main door, spatial planning, and structure to ensure the safety and comfort of the inhabitants. Therefore, the arrangement is expected to be in the form of the parts of the human body as well as to ensure the harmonization of other natural elements.

Almost the same model is used by other Bugis people, especially Bone, to build a house, but here (Talungeng Village) is unique, because there is another kind of new ritual in building a house ... Well, as already explained, the inside of the house is expected to resemble the human body. (Informant, Sanro-Bola and Head of Talungeng Village, 2019)

4.1.1 Concept of Orientation and Placement of the Main Door of the Bugis House in Talungeng Village

The orientation of the house for the Bugis community, in general, is fundamental and sacred, with several elements applied as a guide, such as a mountain, road, river, the sun, sea, and the direction of the wind. However, the layout is generally divided into the mabbuju-bola or longitudinal home, which is a house extending in the east-west orientation and the mpareq-bola or transverse house extending along a north-south orientation, but the Bugis
The house in Talungeng Village uses wind direction guidelines, which are the east, west, and south. The north is excluded because, according to an interview with a Sanro-Bola, the local wisdom of the Bugis Bon believes that a house oriented north indicates ko'no'ki diattang dia bokori Watampone lo diattang', meaning, “when someone goes down from the house to the north, such person is turning back on Watampone or its origin.” The west is considered a divine direction because of the location of the Qibla of the Muslims, while the east is the direction of the rising sun and symbolizes fertility and enthusiasm for life. In line with the statement from Altman and Chemers (1984), while studying the Indian-American community, that the cosmology of the Indian Pueblo community in America involved east, the direction of the rising sun, as a very sacred direction, considered a “father” who helped grow their plants and guide tribal travelers in the daily hunt for their homes in the west.

“If you pay attention here (Talungeng Village), it was established following the east, west, and south winds. There is no house here Talungeng Village) facing west (Bone direction). For us Bugis Bone people, we believe that it's not good to turn our backs on Watampone. Because Bone is in the west direction, similar to the course of Qibla (the path of Islamic worship which refers to Mecca - Saudi Arabia).” (Informant, Head of Talungeng Village, 2018)

The house orientation for the Bugis community in the Talungeng Village, in particular, and the Bugis tribe in South Sulawesi, in general, cannot be separated from the placement of the entrance. This is due to the analogy established between the access to the house and a human mouth before food is put into the body. The entrance is seen as the link between the “world” outside and the “world” inside the house and also observed to be very important to the suitability of a building’s orientation for the residents. The door is not necessarily required to be installed along the same orientation as the house, and the placement is determined by the direction favored by the local community.

That is the door of the house, like a human mouth, which means whatever is entering needs to be good. Because if things that come to the original human body are not good (derived from cheating, stealing, or taking the rights of others), then it is not suitable for fortune and will affect people’s lives (peace). Moreover, this is a house to be inhabited till death, therefore, the door needs to be placed in an appropriate position. Hmm ... if after installation, a door is observed to be in a wrong position, that would be dismantled and the door reinstalled according to our calculations (Sanro-Bola) to ensure excellent and lasting fortune in the house (homeowner). (Informant, Sanro bola, 2018)

Therefore, the orientations considered reasonable by the Bugis Bone people in the village of Talungeng are east, west, and south, and the entrance is expected to be placed in the same direction, so that if the house is oriented toward the east, the door should also be installed facing east (Bugis: dilau'). This ensures good spirit, comfort, and sound health can be expected in the house, because the sun rising in the east is a source of energy and life.

The local wisdom of the Talungeng Village community believes “nakko no'ki in Lau (east) yaro Mata essoe (sun) menre 'malolo, jaji malessi pappineddingnge, makeccee' tuwongengnge,” meaning, “The sun rising at a
house oriented to the east helps the occupants not to step on their shadows when there is a shadow of the sun during the day.” This is necessary because it is believed that stepping on one’s shadow at home during the day leads to being useless due to the lack of direct sunlight which further causes a weakening of feelings, lack of enthusiasm, and quick affliction with diseases. A house with the entrance oriented to the east is shown in Figure 2.

That is, if you build a house, the principle is to ensure that during the day, the shadow is not trampled upon because stepping on it causes loss of life spirit and frequent sickness. (Informant, Sanro-Bola & House-owner, 2018–2019)

![Figure 2. Layout and Position](image)

According to the interviews, the orientation of the Bugis house to the west with the entrance also installed to face west (Bugis: diaywa) is believed to be good because it is oriented toward Qibla (Bugis: diioloi kibla’E), which is the focal point of Islamic Ummah when praying. Likewise, a house oriented to the south with the entrance facing the same direction (Bugis: diattang) was also found to be good because, according to the Bugis Bone perspective, “no’ki ri atuwingengne,” it brings a comfortable experience. Houses oriented to the north (Bugis: diawang) are believed to be less good, because the placement of the main door to the north means picking up death (Bugis: no’ki riamatengengne). This deficiency can be corrected by placing an east-oriented door on the left side of the house or a door facing west on the right side of the house. This, therefore, means it is not necessary for the main entrance to be placed on the front wall of the house; it also can be on the sidewall.

4.1.2 The Concept of Inhabiting the Bugis House of Talungeng Village

The general concept of a Bugis house requires placing the residential area in the middle (Bugis: ale-bola) with respect to the vertical arrangement, while the top area is the roof and the space below it (Bugis: rakkeang), and the bottom area is under or the lowest portion of the house (Bugis: awa-bola). However, the horizontal aspect, the floor plan or the residential area, is divided
into different areas or *lontang/latte’* with each performing different functions, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. The Philosophy of a Bugis Stage House that Vertically Adopts the Human Body](image)

*Figure 3 shows the spatial concept in a Bone Bugis house is horizontally divided into different areas, with the front-most *watangpola* or terrace, known as *lego-lego*, functioning as a receiving or transition area before entering the living room. Moreover, in the *lego-lego* attached to the stairs, there is a front wall to place the entrance and front windows; the size of the room is generally 2.95 meters long and the area is not expected to be longer than this because it symbolizes a child in the Bugis Bone tribe. This means the vertical structure of a Bugis house-shaped stage is sourced from the anatomy of the human body in a standing position requiring sturdy rigid legs (under/house poles) to support the organization (residential space) and head (roof). Moreover, the feet (columns/poles) in the Bugis philosophy play a role in sustaining the home and the lives of all the occupants (house bodies) with the frame structure, illustrating the robustness to protect the residents.

After the *lego-lego*, there is a public area/living room (*lontang risaliweng*) which serves as a place to receive guests, both families and relatives visiting the house, for girls to receive proposals, and to perform sacred rituals for marriage. In the old-style Bugis house, there is usually no furniture, with only a mat laid in the form of a rug or carpet on the floor. However, through the influence of other cultures, the area is now equipped with furniture such as chairs and tables to entertain guests. The length of this area is 3.00 meters, which is 0.05 meters longer than the *lego-lego* and considered a symbol of authority and the influence of parents over the children’s space. It is also made more extensive, with the furniture placed to allow free movement of people, both family and guests, while gathering.

The next space in the *watangpola* is the private central area (*lontang/latte ri tangnga*) containing the bedroom and a family room. The bedroom is organized based on the belief the best sleeping position is to face the east with the head to the west, and the sleeping area is believed to be useful when facing north with the leader in the south. These positions are considered best because they avoid sleeping facing the *Qibla* and also avoid turning their backs to *watampone*, as shown in Figure 4.
The measurements of the spatial layout were repeated to maintain a balance between the front and the back to ensure structural stability.

In everyday life, the nature space (lontang/latte ri tangngah) is a place used for bathing and burying corpses. It is 3.05 meters in length and 0.05 meters longer than the previous room (lontang risaliweng), which means the size of the space in the house is directly proportional to its function and diversity in its use. The same was observed with the next area, which is the rear or private area (lontang ri laleng), the fourth plot in the floor plan. It is considered discrete because the girls' bedroom is always protected but is sometimes used for dining and aqiqah, a ritual to welcome the birth of a baby in the Islamic tradition. Its size is 3.07 meters, meaning it is larger than the terrace (lontang ri saliweng) of 2.95 meters, the public area of 3.0 meters, the middle room (lontang ritengngah) of 3.05 meters, and the nature space (lontang rilaleng) of 3.07 meters. However, an additional plot/zone (lontang) would change the plot size to the most significant proportion of 3.05 meters, as shown in Figure 5.

The last area in the structure is the kitchen (jongke), which serves as a place to cook, clean kitchen equipment, and prepare a first-stage corpse before it is moved to the lontang/latte ri tangngah. It is 3.0 meters long and found to be
lesser than the previous plot size, which means the fortune obtained by the residents is not reduced or exhausted. Moreover, the roof is mostly constructed with palm leaves (pari) as shown in Figure 6, and the length is expected to exceed the length of the housing body through the process known as bulena or in architectural terms, overhang. The bulena serves as a protector from rainwater and provides shade away from the sun shining brightly at a 45-degree angle or in a perpendicular position at the top of the house. Therefore, it can be concluded that it protects the house from high humidity during periods of rain and high heat in the afternoon.

4.2 The Structural Concept of a Bugis House is a Reflection of Human Body Anatomy and is used for Disaster Mitigation

Indonesia's geographical condition is prone to natural disasters including earthquakes, flooding, and strong winds. Based on the experience of the Bugis people, the traditional stage house has been confirmed to have the ability to provide excellent protection against some of these disasters. For example, the structures are not affected by earthquakes and it was also discovered that floods as high as 2 meters do not disturb the community, because the height of the lower pole of the house is higher than 2 meters. Moreover, the house cannot be lifted or toppled by tornadoes.

The house legs or poles are constructed to be continuously firm without any connection from the ground to the edge of the roof aids the strength and survival of the house against strong winds as illustrated in Figure 7, points A and B. The existence of arateng and pattolo' beams, the main connecting shafts supporting the house, play a vital role in strengthening the position of
the pole to ensure the structure is not lifted or rolled. *Arateng* is a long flat beam with length equal to the length of the house and serves as a barrier to the pillars, while *pattolo’* is a flat beam with length equal to the width of the house, the function of which is to hold the poles connected by *rateng*.

The pillars are free-standing without any connection to the stone foundation, commonly called pedestals or *pallangga*, as shown in Figure 7 (point C) and Figure 8. The *pallangga* is the only component of the building to be moved in the event of a violent shock during an earthquake to ensure the house poles and their structures are stable. Moreover, during a period of a long drought, there is usually a decrease in the soil; the *pallanga* prevents the body or structure of the building to lower due to the land subsidence.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 8. The Composition Shaft Arrangement and Structure*

The house poles made of ironwood, Merbau, and bayam wood (English and Latin: *Malacca Teak, Ironwood, Macrolobium bijugum, Intsia amboinensis, and Intsia retusa*) are connected with the supporting shaft at a height of 2.5 meters above the ground surface to provide aerodynamic space in the house, protect the occupants in case of flooding, and ensure the house does not collapse easily in case of an earthquake compared to a house with foundations laid directly on the ground. Meanwhile, the pillar standing on a rock buffer (*Pallangga-aliri*) helps to reduce the vibration of the earth/land during an earthquake. Moreover, the materials used, such as ironwood, Merbau, and bayam wood, are flexible, durable, natural insulators against electricity, have the ability to maintain air humidity at seasonal temperatures, and are non-flammable.

### 4.3 Theoretical, Managerial and Social Life Implications

Based on architectural science, structures that are bound together have been constructed in the Talungeng Village community since long before the rapid modern development of architecture. Implicitly, the adoption of human anatomical structures in buildings provides cultural values and has been used for many years to minimize the effects of natural disasters such as earthquakes and strong winds, as previously stated. For example, the composition of the clusters of beam-supporting structures, beam arrangement, materials on stilts, and the availability of aerodynamic space provides added value to ensure strength and reduce the effects of climate change on the residents.
5. CONCLUSION

This study showed that the adoption of human body size in horizontal Bugis house construction serves to realize a house plan with spatial organization, relationships, and functions similar to the human body in a reclining position. From the vertical perspective, the aim is to realize a stage-shaped home with a frame that stands firmly like that of a human body, consisting of supporting poles, body, and the roof, as an inseparable unitary structure. Moreover, this intact skeletal structure forms a dwelling with the strength and security to protect the occupants from all forms of natural conditions and disasters.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Figure 9. Layout of Talungeng Village
GLOSSARY

Ale-Bola: The house’s primary space
Arateng: Long flat beam
Awa-Bola: Under the house (stilt-house)
Bola-Ugi: Bugis House
Bulena: Overhang
Diattang: South direction
Diawang: North direction
Dioloi: Toward Qibla
Eppa’: Four
Feng-shui: Ancient Chinese Tradition
Lego-Lego: Front terrace
Lontang Rilaleng: Inner room
Lontang Risaliweng: Front room
Lontang Ritengngah: Central room
Lontang: Space
Mabbuju-bola: The size refers to the length toward the back of the house
Mpareq-bola: Width of the house
Pallangga: Pedestals
Pallangga-aliri: Pole support
Panrita-Bola: Someone who has tacit knowledge in terms of building traditional Bugis houses, regarding the practice and knowledge of house structure.
Pari: Size of roof made by palm leaves
Pattolo’: Longitudinal Beam
Qibla: Muslim direction (toward Saudi Arabia). For Muslims, this is the direction in which to pray.
Rakkeang: The space between the ceiling and the roof
Sanro-Bola: Someone who has tacit knowledge in terms of building traditional Bugis houses
Sulapa’-eppa’: Square (size / type)
Watangpola: Terrace