

VERNACULAR VEILING: *RIMPU*, EMBODIED PIETY, AND MUSLIM WOMEN'S AGENCY IN BIMA

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Abstract

Studies of women's Muslim attire often focus on standardised hijabs and the dichotomy of oppression versus resistance, resulting in vernacular practices and women's agency being overlooked. Rimpu—the practice among women in Bima of wrapping the body in two traditional sarongs (tembe nggoli)—is highlighted as a vernacular expression of religious identity. Drawing on ethnographic methods (interviews, observation, documentation) and Spradley's analytical framework (domains, taxonomy, componential analysis, cultural themes), this study examines Rimpu through Saba Mahmood's concept of 'embodied piety' and the field of veiled anthropology. The findings: Rimpu is more than just a set of functions; it is a vernacular representation of Islamic modesty standards. The Bima weaving tradition localises the global norm of body covering, resulting in a specific regional Muslim femininity as embodied piety. Rimpu is being supplanted by standardised global hijabs, which has prompted the revival of Rimpu as a cultural legacy through festivals and school curricula. Such revitalisation runs the risk of folklorizing a live practice while contributing to a theory of vernacular head-covering' that transcends the oppression-resistance duality by emphasising women's autonomy and the localisation of Islamic faith.

Keywords: *Rimpu; vernacular veiling; embodied piety; Muslim women's agency; Bima*

Abstrak

Kajian busana Muslim perempuan sering terfokus pada jilbab terstandar dan dikotomi penindasan versus perlawanan, sehingga praktik vernakular dan agensi perempuan kurang diperhatikan. *Rimpu*—praktek perempuan Bima membungkus tubuh dengan dua sarung tradisional (*tembe nggoli*)—diangkat sebagai ekspresi vernakular identitas keagamaan. Berbasis etnografi (wawancara, observasi, dokumentasi) dan analisis ala Spradley (domain, taksonomi, komponensial, tema budaya), penelitian ini membaca *Rimpu* lewat konsep *embodied piety* Saba Mahmood dan antropologi berkerudung. Temuannya; *Rimpu* bukan sekadar sebagai rangkaian fungsi, melainkan materialisasi vernakular atas norma kesopanan Islam. Norma global menutup tubuh dilokalkan melalui tradisi tenun Bima sehingga melahirkan femininitas Muslim khas daerah sebagai kesalehan yang menubuh. *Rimpu* kian tergeser oleh jilbab transnasional yang terstandar, ketegangan yang memicu revitalisasi *Rimpu* sebagai warisan melalui festival dan kurikulum. Revitalisasi semacam itu berisiko memfolklorikan praktik yang hidup, dan menyumbang teorisasi tentang "berkerudung vernakular" yang melampaui dikotomi penindasan-perlawanan dengan menonjolkan agensi perempuan dan pelokalan kesalehan Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Rimpu; berkerudung vernakular; kesalehan yang menubuh; agensi perempuan Muslim; Bima*

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of Islam with local customs has generated rich processes of religious acculturation, extensively studied across West Africa (Soares & Otayek, 2007), South and Southeast Asia (Bowen, 2020; Buehler, 1998), and the Middle East (Eickelman & Piscatori, 2018). In these contexts, Muslim communities actively negotiate and reinterpret Islamic teachings through local cultural frameworks rather than passively absorbing them, producing hybrid expressions that are simultaneously orthodox and locally specific. Various terms "vernacular Islam" (Buehler, 1998), "local Islam" (Bowen, 2020), or "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt, 2017), this dynamic represents one of Islam's most significant features as a global religion: its capacity to assume diverse cultural forms without abandoning its doctrinal core.

Culture plays a crucial role in shaping a society's identity, both cultural and religious. As a value system, culture influences how individuals think, act, and interact, making its understanding essential for comprehending human behaviour at local and global levels (Kusherdiana, 2020; Melia, 2020). In Indonesia, numerous cultures reflect a harmonious blend of local traditions and religious values (Nainggolan et al., 2025; Sholihin & Rahmania, 2024). Traditional clothing, in particular, often serves as a marker of regional identity while simultaneously embodying spiritual meanings. This demonstrates that culture frequently acts as a bridge between local wisdom and religious teachings (Lestary, 2023).

Veiling has become globally contested across jurisprudence, politics, feminism and cultural policy. France's public face-covering ban ignited debates on secularism, freedom and religious expression (Ahmed, 2011). In Turkey, the headscarf long symbolised conflict between Kemalist secularism and Islamic revival (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015). Parmaksız (2025) argues the AKP transformed the gender regime toward a public-conservative, paternalistic model that reframes religious women as "religious thus modest." This paradox—simultaneous empowerment and constraint—echoes in many Muslim contexts, including Indonesia, highlighting the complex political and gendered dimensions of veiling.

In Iran, the mandatory hijab has become a site of resistance and negotiation (Mahmood, 2011). Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, veiling practices have taken diverse forms, from the *tudung* in Malaysia to the *cadar* in Brunei, each shaped by local cultural contexts and state policies (Tarlo, 2010). A growing body of research on female Muslim identity and modest fashion consumption in Western countries, such as the UK, reveals that young Muslim women seek to reconcile their religious identity with fashion trends, facing challenges of limited availability, family influence, and varying levels of religiosity (Ashraf et al., 2023). These global patterns underscore the need to examine local veiling traditions not in isolation but as part of a broader transnational phenomenon.

Much scholarship on Muslim women's dress tends to focus on the standardised hijab and to frame veiling through a binary of oppression versus resistance, leaving vernacular, locally materialised forms—and women's own agency within them—under-examined. As Mahmood (2011) argues, this binary fails to capture how women's religious practices constitute forms of agency irreducible to either submission or resistance; rather than equating agency with resistance to norms, her concept of "embodied piety" demonstrates how pious subjects cultivate themselves through bodily practices oriented towards religious virtue. Combined with the anthropology of veiling (Ahmed, 1999; El Guindi, 2011), this framework grounds the analysis of *Rimpu* as a lived practice through which Bima women actively constitute themselves as pious Muslim subjects.

Indonesia presents a distinct context where veiling is not state-mandated but arises from local tradition, Islamic piety and consumer fashion (Brenner, 1996; Moors, 2010), *Rimpu*, a Bima (West Nusa Tenggara) practice, uses the pre-existing *tembe nggoli sarong* wrapped to cover the *aurat* rather than a modern *jilbab*. Unlike Middle Eastern *niqab* or *burqa*, *Rimpu* is rooted in local material culture, making it a revealing case for how indigenous forms negotiate global Islamic norms and persist amid globalisation pressures. Its locality highlights processes of cultural adaptation, identity formation and the vernacularisation of modesty.

Fitriana & Suharno (2019a) define *Rimpu* as a local tradition of the Bima community used to cover the genitals with *tembe* (*sarong*). It involves wrapping a *sarong* around the head so that only the

face—or only the eyes—remain visible. The *sarong* used is typically the *nggoli sarong* or *tembe nggoli*, a hand-woven cotton cloth with distinctive motifs and bright colours (Asiah & Fauzan, 2024; Irfan, 2022). *Rimpu* is more than clothing; it symbolizes honour, politeness, and obedience to both customary rules and Islamic teachings. It is worn during important events, from traditional ceremonies to religious activities, and continues to be passed down through generations.

There are two forms of *Rimpu*: *Rimpu Colo* (worn by married women, face visible) and *Rimpu Mpida* (worn by unmarried women, only eyes visible) (Fitriana & Suharno, 2019a; Setiabudi & Herianto, 2023). Widows also wear *Rimpu Colo* but with a slight variation in how it is draped (Irawan et al., 2018). This distinction serves as a social marker, differentiating marital status and age. Despite the influence of modernity, many young Bima women still wear *Rimpu* as an expression of cultural pride and religious piety (Rizki et al., 2020).

Franzke et al. (2022) argue that religion—whether Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, or Confucianism—significantly limits or allows women's access to resources, education, and networks. Female entrepreneurs in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan confront challenges such as a lack of financing, limited mobility, and religiously based gender discrimination. The *tembe nggoli* weavers in Bima, who are largely elderly women, represent this challenge: they lack economic support, and younger women are hesitant to acquire the art due to modernisation and low profitability. Thus, *Rimpu* is not only a religious and cultural icon, but also a financial concern affecting women's lives.

However, *Rimpu*, like many other local traditions, confronts severe challenges. Globalisation and the rise of social media have introduced new fashion trends, such as the commercially produced *jilbab*, which some young women consider more practical and trendier (Hapsah et al., 2024; Inayati, 2019; Wati et al., 2023). According to Irfan (2022) the expansion of the fashion business has forced several Bima women to abandon *Rimpu*, which is no longer considered relevant to current jobs. The local administration, cultural figures, and communities have organised cultural parades and featured *Rimpu* in educational programs (Fitriana & Suharno, 2019a). The 383rd Bima Anniversary Cultural Parade in 2023 set a MURI record (Indonesian World Record Museum) for the largest *Rimpu* parade with 21,383 participants (Nurdin, 2021).

Previous studies have addressed several aspects of *Rimpu*. Yunus et al. (2024) interpreted *Rimpu* as an expression of women's religious freedom, while noting its gradual displacement by modern garments such as the *jilbab*. Marzuki & Hayati (2023) emphasised *Rimpu*'s moral and religious educational values, Fitriana & Suharno (2019a) documented its persistence amid contemporary fashion trends. However, this literature remains largely descriptive and locally bounded: none situate *Rimpu* within wider comparative or theoretical frameworks, nor do they offer policy-oriented recommendations for cultural preservation. In particular, studies have not connected *Rimpu* to global debates on veiling, acculturation and heritage, examined comparative cases (e.g. Turkey, the UK), or engaged gender, sexuality and religion theories to read *Rimpu* as vernacular veiling that actively shapes women's piety (Schnabel et al., 2022).

Schnabel et al. (2022) offer a critical integrative review of gender, sexuality, and religion, proposing three frameworks: gender and queer lenses, cultural analysis of symbolic boundaries, and intersectionality or "complex religion" (Wilde, 2018). These are useful for analysing *Rimpu* as a symbolic boundary distinguishing Bima Muslim woman from secular or non-Muslim others, and as an intersectional site where gender, religion, ethnicity, and class converge. Similarly, Isnaeni et al. (2025), applying van Gennep's rite of passage and Lefebvre's production of space to the *Buka Kampung* ritual in the Banda Islands, demonstrate how rituals produce sacred landscapes through separation, liminality, and incorporation—a process mirrored in *Rimpu* as a liminal practice transitioning women from the profane to the sacred.

This study fills a gap by treating *Rimpu* as vernacular veiling — a local materialisation of the global Islamic norm of modesty that women actively inhabit as embodied piety — thereby moving beyond the oppression–resistance binary to foreground female agency. It asks how *Rimpu* functions as a vernacular expression of Muslim women's religious identity in Bima, what it reveals about relations between local cultural forms and global Islamic norms, how women experience and

negotiate *Rimpu* as embodied piety, and what tensions arise amid globalisation and heritage preservation. By integrating literature on veiling, gender regimes, modest fashion and ritual landscapes, and by comparing cases in Turkey, the UK and other Asian contexts, the study contributes a novel theoretical and comparative account of *Rimpu* and its preservation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study takes a qualitative, ethnographic approach. According to Creswell (2014), ethnographic design is a qualitative research method for describing and examining cultural groups by understanding behavioural patterns, belief systems, and language use that emerge and are practiced within a community across time. Ethnography was used to gain a deeper understanding of *Rimpu* practice and the meanings that Muslim women in Bima build when expressing their religious identity.

This study employs a dual theoretical framework. The primary analytical lens is Saba Mahmood's (2011) account of embodied piety, which challenges the liberal assumption that agency consists in resistance to norms, showing instead how pious subjects cultivate themselves through bodily practices oriented towards religious virtue. This allows *Rimpu* to be read not as a passive tradition or marker of oppression, but as a practice through which Bima women actively constitute themselves as pious Muslim subjects. Second, the anthropology of veiling (Ahmed, 2011; El Guindi, 1999) provides the broader comparative context for understanding veiling as a diverse, culturally specific practice rather than a monolithic phenomenon.

This research was conducted in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, where *Rimpu* is practised and transmitted across generations. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their engagement in and knowledge of *Rimpu* activities. Data were gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation: observation entailed direct engagement with the community's social context to examine *Rimpu*'s use in social and religious activities, while interviews investigated informants' experiences and subjective interpretations of *Rimpu* as an expression of religious identity. Documentation comprised field notes, photographs, and textual sources. Data were analysed using Spradley's four-stage ethnographic model—domain, taxonomic, componential, and cultural-theme analysis (Emzir, 2018).

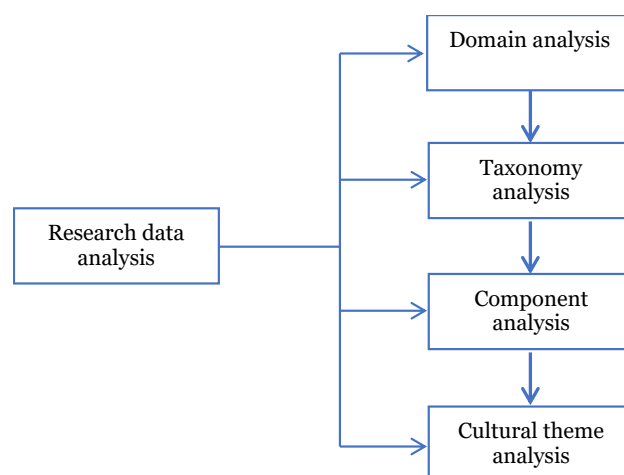


Figure 1.
Data analysis of James P. Spradley's model (Researcher, 2025)

The first stage is domain analysis, which aims to identify the main categories of meaning that emerge from interview and observation data. In this study, the domains identified include *Rimpu* as traditional clothing, *Rimpu* as a symbol of religious identity, *Rimpu* as a form of obedience to covering the genitals, *Rimpu* as moral education, and *Rimpu* as a medium for preaching. These domains were derived from informants' terms, expressions, and explanations, as repeated in interviews, regarding their understanding and experiences in the *Rimpu* culture.

The second stage is taxonomic analysis, namely the development and grouping of domains into a more detailed and systematic structure. At this stage, the domain "*Rimpu* as a religious identity," for example, is classified into subcategories such as awareness of covering the genitals, Muslim women's piety, sense of moral responsibility, and representation of Muslim women's identity in public spaces. Taxonomic analysis helps researchers understand the relationships between elements within a domain and how the meaning of *Rimpu* is constructed in stages in the social lives of Bima women.

The componential analysis identifies variation in meaning and function across *Rimpu* practices by comparing forms such as *Rimpu Colo* and *Rimpu Mpida* according to social and religious attributes. Differences among *Rimpu* are not merely aesthetic but signify social status, life stage and divergent religious norms within Bima Muslim women. Consequently, *Rimpu* operates as a system differentiating women's social and religious identities. The final cultural-theme analysis synthesises domains and categories, yielding *Rimpu* as the central cultural theme: a vernacular expression of embodied piety through which Bima women actively localise and inhabit the global Islamic norm of modesty.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History and Origins of The Emergence of *Rimpu* Culture in Bima Society

Before the arrival of Hinduism in the 14th century and Islam in the 17th century, Bima society adhered to *Makamba Makimbi* beliefs, a form of animism and dynamism. *Makamba Makimbi* held that ancestral spirits inhabited natural objects and places, imbuing them with sacredness. This belief system began to decline after Islam entered Bima in the 17th century, coinciding with the transformation of the kingdom into a sultanate. This transition led to the widespread adoption of Islam and changes in social order. According to Fitriana and Suharno (2019a), the Sultan ordered Bima women to cover their bodies when leaving the house. This veiling practice came to be known as *Rimpu*.

An interview with a cultural observer in Bima explained (interview, February 15, 2025):

"When we talk about *Rimpu*, it cannot be separated from the history of Islam's arrival in Bima. From the stories passed down through generations, Islam was first brought by preachers from Makassar. Since then, many changes have occurred, including the way women dress. Previously, women in Bima did wear woven fabrics, but there were no clear rules about covering the *aurat*."

The introduction of *Rimpu* is attributed to Sultan Abdul Kahir, the first king of the Bima sultanate, who accepted Islam and mandated that women cover their *aurat* properly (Aksa, 2018; Rahman, 2000). The term *Rimpu* originates from the Bima language, meaning "to cover the head and body with a *sarong*." Unlike the modern *jilbab*, which is typically a stitched garment, *Rimpu* uses two pieces of *tembe nggoli sarong*: one to cover the head and upper body, and another as a skirt (Atiaprilia, 2024; Setiabudi & Herianto, 2023).

The *tembe nggoli* is a hand-woven cotton *sarong* with distinctive geometric motifs and bright colors. It is considered a local wisdom of Bima, valued for being warm, smooth, durable, and resistant to wrinkling or fading (Fitriani et al., 2024; Wahyudi & Kusdarini, 2020). As one weaver stated:

“..... *tembe nggoli* is actually a *sarong* typical of the Bima people. It is made of cotton, woven by hand, and comes in various colours. It has been worn by the people here since long ago. It is woven not only to be sold, but also to be worn by the weavers themselves. Its main purpose is to cover



Figure 2.
Tembe Nggoli

Rimpu has been embedded in history and has become a typical culture of the Bima region. However, it cannot be denied that the tradition of covering the genitals, such as the jilbab or veil with various variations and names, has had a more extended history even before the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Nasaruddin Umar (1996) in (Fitriana & Suharno, 2019b) states that before the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, in the Torah, there was a term that was equivalent to the hijab, namely *tiferet*, while in the Bible, there were terms such as *redid*, *zammah*, *re'alah*, *zaif*, and *mitpahat* which had the same meaning, as a cover for the genitals. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, several terms were known for clothing, such as *khimar*, which was used to cover the head; *dir*, which covered the body; *niqab* and *burqa*, which covered the face except for the eyes; *idzar*, a sewn garment that covered the body to the feet; and *rida'*, which was outer clothing that covered the upper body to above the *idzar* (Badwi, 2015 Aksa, 2018).

Bima society recognises two forms of *Rimpu*: *Rimpu Colo* and *Rimpu Mpida*, each with distinct meanings and functions. *Rimpu Colo*, typically worn by married women (Asiah et al., 2024) envelops the body while leaving the face visible and resembles a jilbab; unlike the contemporary *hijab*, which commonly covers the head but leaves the arms exposed, *Rimpu Colo* conceals the entire body except the face. *Rimpu Mpida*, associated with young or unmarried women (Asiah et



Figure 3.
Rimpu Mpida

the *aurat*. Not only women wear it, but men do too. However, for women, *tembe nggoli* is worn for *Rimpu*. So, when the Bima people say *Rimpu*, they definitely wear *Tembe nggoli*. It is still worn today, even though there are many modern fabrics available. However, *Tembe nggoli* is still preserved because it has become a characteristic and local wisdom of the Bima people.”



Figure 4.
Rimpu Colo

al., 2024; Aksa, 2018) exposes only the eyes and is often described as the prototypical Bima veil. Functionally, *Rimpu Mpida* is used in contexts where women have prior acquaintance with men, distinguishing social interactions and boundaries. Together, the two *Rimpu* forms operate as a sartorial system that marks marital status and mediates gendered sociality, signalling differences in life stage, propriety and relational norms within Bima Muslim communities.

From a global perspective, *Rimpu* is similar to other local veiling customs. In Malaysia and Brunei, the tudung covers the head but not the face, similar to *Rimpu Colo*, whereas the purdah

in South Asia and the *niqab* in the Arab world cover the face, similar to *Rimpu Mpida* (Moors, 2010; Tarlo, 2010). However, a crucial distinction is that *Rimpu* is a wrapped cloth rather than a sewn garment, making it more similar to *hijab* types in regions of Africa and the safari in Iran. This materiality—the usage of locally woven *tembe nggoli*—is what gives *Rimpu* its own cultural identity.

Rimpu as Vernacular Veiling: Embodied Piety and Muslim Women's Agency

Drawing on Mahmood's (2011) framework of embodied piety, this study argues that *Rimpu* is best understood not merely as a set of functions or as a passive tradition, but as a vernacular materialization of Islamic modesty—a practice through which Bima women actively cultivate themselves as pious Muslim subjects. Unlike the standardized *hijab*, which has become increasingly detached from local contexts, *Rimpu* embeds the global Islamic norm of covering within the specific material and social fabric of Bima society. One informant, a female activist from the *Rimpu* movement, articulated this embodied dimension:

"For me, *Rimpu* is a sign that we are Muslim women. Once we wear *Rimpu*, we feel that we must take better care of ourselves, not only in terms of clothing but also in terms of attitude. The way we speak, walk, and socialize is also taken into consideration, because people see us as women who represent our religion. From a young age, our parents taught us this, so over time it became a habit and a personal awareness. That's why when we wear *Rimpu*, we feel a sense of responsibility as Muslim women."

This passage exemplifies Mahmood's embodied piety: piety as self-cultivation through repeated bodily practices. *Rimpu* functions not merely as an external identity marker but as an internal process shaping posture, speech and social interaction—a comprehensive bodily orientation toward religious virtue, reflecting active self-formation rather than passive submission.

Mahmood's framework counters the liberal view that agency equals resistance, showing agency can involve actively embracing norms to shape the self. Bima women wearing *Rimpu* do not merely conform; through daily practice they constitute pious subjectivities, expressing agency by inhabiting a locally specific form of veiling rather than rejecting it.

This discovery is also consistent with the anthropology of veiling. El Guindi (1999) demonstrated how veiling practices vary and are culturally specific throughout the Muslim world, frequently enmeshed in local social structures and meanings. Ahmed (2011) investigated the historical and political implications of veiling, demonstrating how it has been enforced and accepted in various circumstances. *Rimpu*, a type of vernacular veiling, contributes to this variation by demonstrating how a global norm becomes localised through distinct material and social behaviours.

At the same time, *Rimpu* operates as what Schnabel et al. (2022) call a symbolic boundary. In the United States and globally, gender and sexuality have become key cultural divides, with religious groups distinguishing themselves through positions on abortion, same-sex marriage, and veiling. Similarly, in Bima, women who wear *Rimpu* are perceived as pious and honourable, while those who do not may face social sanctions. This boundary work is not merely local but resonates with global patterns. In Turkey, Parmaksız (2025) found that religious women wearing headscarves are similarly distinguished from secular women, experiencing a tension between self-proving and being a token. One Turkish participant stated, "Thinking that wearing a headscarf is not mostly perceived as approvable, I feel that I try to tolerate it by struggling to be seen as respectable" (Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2025). This mirrors the Bima informant's experience of heightened responsibility.

From the perspective of modest fashion consumption in the UK (Ashraf et al., 2023), young Muslim women also seek to balance religious identity with fashionability. UK respondents expressed frustration about limited availability of fashionable modest clothing, similar to Bima women who struggle to find *tembe nggoli sarongs* amid competition from mass-produced fabrics. Both groups also highlighted the importance of family influence and varying levels of religiosity. This suggests that Muslim women globally share a concern for modesty, fashionability, and social recognition, though the specific material forms differ.

Islamic Values and the Articulation of Modesty

Values are principles or standards considered important by individuals or groups in society in determining actions, attitudes, and decisions. Ilmawati et al. (2023a) state that values function as the leading guide that helps distinguish between right and wrong and are often used as guidelines in community life. The values that shape human behaviour and personality are influenced by the values in the culture of the community living in a particular area (Alghifari et al., 2022). Religious values are concepts related to belief, belief, or the relationship between humans and God in living life (Ilmawati et al., 2023b). Islamic values include all the rules that govern human life, including how to think, speak, dress, and behave, all of which have been determined by Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Harapan, 2015).

Importantly, however, rather than treating these values as objective functions of *Rimpu*, this study follows Mahmood in understanding them as part of a discourse of modesty that women themselves articulate and inhabit. The Islamic values identified in *Rimpu* culture—obedience to religious commands by covering the *aurat*, moral education (politeness, modesty), and da'wah through exemplary behaviour—are not simply "in" the practice as objective properties. Rather, they are values that women actively articulate and embody through their practice.

An interview with one of the academics in Bima who teaches local history and culture explains:

“In my opinion, *Rimpu* is a form of obedience to Bima women in Islamic teachings. From what I have read about *Rimpu* and what my elders and teachers have told me, *Rimpu* is how the people of Bima carry out religious commands, so it is not only a cultural heritage, but also a form of worship.

..... *Rimpu* has many moral values if we look at the history and way of life of Bima women. When women wear *Rimpu*, Bima women must maintain their attitude, manner of speaking, and manner of walking; everything is taken into consideration.”

The interview results show that wearing *Rimpu* raises moral and religious awareness among Muslim women. *Rimpu* acts as a mechanism for self-regulation. *Rimpu* clothing serves as a reminder of Islamic values that encourage women to maintain modesty, good character, and appropriate behavior in social settings. Therefore, researchers have identified several Islamic values in *Rimpu*'s culture.

First, the value of obedience to religious commands by covering the private parts. Hamdani et al., (2022) state that covering the *aurat* is a command from Allah that all Muslims must carry out. That a woman's *aurat* is the entire body except for the face and palms of the hands that are visible (Fariza et al., 2024; Kristianto, 2023). *Rimpu* culture has long been considered a symbol of religious identity, especially related to Islamic norms and values. *Rimpu* is a type of cloth that covers the head and body, becoming a symbol of piety and obedience to Islamic teachings, especially in maintaining *aurat* (Fitriana & Suharno, 2019b) *Rimpu* culture teaches women to cover their bodies in a way similar to the *hijab* in Islamic teachings, emphasizing the importance of maintaining modesty and appearing modest (Asiah et al., 2024). *Rimpu* is not just a physical symbol, but *Rimpu* has shown that women understand the boundaries set by Allah, producing a polite and pleasant culture and creating a sense of security and comfort because it is in accordance with the norms in community life (Ilmawati et al., 2023b). *Rimpu* symbolizes the obedience of Bima women in carrying out Islamic law, especially in covering their *aurat* and as a form of their devotion as servants to Allah SWT.

Second, the value of noble moral education. In everyday life, morals are often understood as concepts similar to manners, morality, and politeness, which are also often referred to as morals or ethics in speaking and behaving (Hudah, 2019). Morals are traits that are inherent in humans, which will appear automatically when needed, without having to go through prior thought or consideration and without requiring external encouragement (Bujangga, 2021a; Priyanto, 2020a; Yasin, 2021a). Moral education is one of the essential parts of Islam because it functions as a means for educators to guide students so that they can understand, internalize, and believe in the truth of Islamic teachings and apply them in everyday life (Laras et al., 2023; Yasyakur, 2016). In Bima culture, moral education begins with how to dress. For the Bima community, dressing well

and politely is one form of improving morals. In the *Rimpu* culture, the value of moral education can be seen from the attitude of women in maintaining themselves, politeness, and maintaining views and interactions between women and men. In ancient times, Bima women were required to wear *Rimpu* when leaving the house as a way of maintaining their honor as women (Hairunnisa et al., 2023). Thus, women who use *Rimpu* are considered as women who have good morals.

Third, the value of da'wah in *Rimpu* culture. Islam is a religion that focuses on da'wah, namely a teaching that requires its adherents to spread and inform Islamic values to all mankind as a gift for all creatures (Bastomi, 2017; Ridho, Zurqarnin, & Mahendra, 2021). Allah sent apostles to carry out their duties, namely to uphold goodness and prevent evil (Bahri & Abbas, 2020). Da'wah is an effort to convey, invite, or convey to individuals or communities so that they are willing to know, study, and practice the teachings (Fijri et al., 2023). In this case, preaching is not done through lectures in the pulpit or religious study groups, but preaching can also be delivered through good examples, for example, in the form of celebrations, ways of dressing, and so on.

Rimpu culture embodies da'wah values, representing efforts to spread Islamic teachings through the everyday actions and behaviour of Bima Muslim women, reflected in its cultural practices and use (Pujiani & Rahman, 2021). These preaching values manifest in five ways. First, as role models, women who wear *Rimpu* inspire others by covering their *aurat*, indirectly teaching the importance of modesty and honour. Second, *Rimpu* reflects a strong understanding of Islamic teachings, particularly regarding the covering of *aurat*. Third, it fosters Islamic awareness among women and the wider community. Fourth, it celebrates Islamic values in daily life, thereby strengthening Islamic identity within society. Finally, *Rimpu* promotes goodness, politeness, and ethics, with covering the *aurat* constituting a core aspect of Islamic ethics that contributes to a morally and ethically grounded society.

Thus, the values of da'wah are reflected in the *Rimpu* culture through examples of behaviour, understanding of Islamic teachings, fostering religious awareness, experiencing Islamic values, and spreading goodness and politeness. *Rimpu* is not just a tradition of dressing but also a means of da'wah that combines Islamic values in everyday life, thus playing a role in forming a society that cares more about religion and ethics.

The Tension Between Local and Global: *Rimpu* and the Transnational Hijab

One of the most significant findings of this study is the tension between *Rimpu* as a local, vernacular practice and the growing influence of the standardized, transnational *hijab*. This tension is not merely a matter of fashion but reflects broader dynamics of globalization, deterritorialization, and the politics of Islamic piety.

Several informants noted the increasing displacement of *Rimpu* by the modern jilbab:

"Nowadays, many young women prefer the *hijab* because it is more practical and easier to wear. They think *Rimpu* is old-fashioned and not suitable for modern life. The *hijab* is also available everywhere and, in many styles, so they can follow fashion trends."

This displacement is not simply a matter of individual preference but reflects a global process in which local forms of Islamic practice are increasingly replaced by standardized, transnational forms. The modern *jilbab*, with its mass production and global circulation, represents a form of Islamic modesty that is detached from local contexts. It is, in this sense, a deterritorialized form of piety—one that is available anywhere but rooted nowhere.

This tension has prompted a heritage revival of *Rimpu* through festivals, cultural parades, and school programs. However, this study argues, following the reviewer's suggestion, that such revival risks folklorizing a living practice. When *Rimpu* is performed in festivals and taught in schools as a cultural heritage, it risks becoming a costume—a static symbol of the past rather than a living practice through which women actively constitute their piety.

One informant expressed concern about this tendency:

"In festivals, *Rimpu* is worn like a costume. People wear it for the parade, take photos, and then take it off. That is not the real *Rimpu*. The real *Rimpu* is worn every day, as part of life. It's not just for show."

This critique echoes broader debates in heritage studies about the paradox of preservation: the very effort to preserve a living practice can transform it into something else—a museum piece, a tourist attraction, or a symbol of identity that is no longer lived. This is not to say that preservation efforts are inherently bad, but that they must be approached critically, with attention to the lived experiences and agency of the practitioners themselves.

From a global perspective, this tension resonates with findings from Turkey (Parmaksız, 2025), where the AKP's promotion of modest dress has paradoxically both empowered and constrained women. In the UK (Ashraf et al., 2023), young Muslim women navigate the tension between religious identity and fashionability, often feeling caught between community expectations and their own preferences. In Bima, similar tensions are at play: women must navigate between the local tradition of *Rimpu* and the global fashion of the hijab, between family expectations and personal choice, between tradition and modernity.

This tension also connects to the broader literature on the globalization of Islamic piety. As Mahmood (2011) has shown, the revival of Islamic piety in the contemporary world is not a simple return to tradition but a complex process of negotiation in which global and local elements are constantly being reinterpreted. *Rimpu*, as a form of vernacular veiling, represents one such negotiation: a global norm (covering) is localized through a specific material form (the *tembe nggoli sarong*) and inhabited through specific bodily practices. The tension with the transnational hijab reflects a broader dynamic in which local forms of Islamic practice are being displaced by global ones—a process that is not unique to Bima but is occurring across the Muslim world.

Legal Gaps and Challenges in Preserving *Rimpu* Culture

While cultural preservation is mandated by Indonesian Law No. 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement, the implementation for *Rimpu* remains inadequate. This study identifies three critical policy gaps. First, the absence of legal recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Although *Rimpu* is well-known locally, it has not yet been officially registered with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as an ICH. By comparison, traditions like *Sasirangan* cloth in South Kalimantan and *Ulos* in North Sumatra have received legal protection, government funding, and economic empowerment schemes. Without such recognition, *Rimpu* lacks a legal basis for budget allocation, documentation, and international promotion.

Second, weak integration into the formal education system. While SMA Negeri 1 Woha has pioneered a voluntary *Rimpu* dress code, this initiative remains isolated. There is no regional regulation requiring schools to teach *Rimpu* history, values, or wearing techniques. The local content curriculum (*MULOK*) in Bima includes some cultural topics, but *Rimpu* is not systematically embedded. Interviews with teachers revealed that many students cannot correctly distinguish *Rimpu Colo* from *Rimpu Mpida* or explain its Islamic values.

Third, lack of economic support for *tembe nggoli* weavers. The survival of *Rimpu* depends on the continued production of *tembe nggoli* sarongs. However, weavers face competition from cheap, mass-produced fabrics from Java and China. Most weavers are elderly women, and younger generations show little interest in learning the craft. No specific budget from the Bima Regency or Provincial government is allocated to support weaving cooperatives, provide training, or market *tembe nggoli* beyond local fairs.

These policy gaps are not unique to Bima. Franzke et al. (2022) note that across Asia, female entrepreneurs face religious and cultural constraints that limit access to capital, education, and networks. In Indonesia specifically, "religious constraints constitute a key reason for the low representation of Indonesian women among entrepreneurs" (Tambunan, 2017 cited in Franzke et al., 2022, p. 354). The *Tembe Nggoli* weavers exemplify this: they lack access to microcredit, training, and market linkages.

Comparative Global Perspectives: Turkey, UK, and Bima

The experiences of Bima women wearing *Rimpu* share striking similarities with religious women in Turkey (Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2025) and modest fashion consumers in the UK (Female Muslim Identity and Modest Clothing Consumption, n.d.). In Turkey, Parmaksız found that religious

women experience a paradox: the AKP lifted the headscarf ban, granting them access to public spaces, but simultaneously constrained them through paternalistic policies emphasizing family roles and anti-feminist rhetoric. Similarly, in Bima, the local government has promoted *Rimpu* through festivals and parades, yet women still face economic marginalization and lack of representation in policy-making.

In the UK, research on modest fashion consumption revealed that young Muslim women are keen to follow fashion trends but struggle with limited availability and negative stereotypes. One respondent said, "It's about what I would look like to other people" (Female Muslim Identity and Modest Clothing Consumption, n.d., p. 12). Bima women echoed this: "I do care what others think of me and I want to be known for good fashion choices" (interview, February 20, 2025). Both groups also highlighted the role of family expectations: older family members often enforce traditional modesty standards.

From a ritual and spatial perspective, Isnaeni et al. (2025) show how the *Buka Kampung* ritual in the Banda Islands produces sacred space through three phases: separation (leaving daily life), liminality (visiting sacred sites), and incorporation (returning renewed). Wearing *Rimpu* can be understood as a similar liminal practice. When a woman puts on *Rimpu*, she separates from secular dress, enters a liminal state of heightened religious awareness, and is incorporated back into society as a visibly pious Muslim woman. This ritualized practice reinforces collective identity and social cohesion, much like the pilgrimage to *keramat* sites in Banda.

Efforts and Recommendations for Preserving *Rimpu* Culture

Preservation is an effort by a community group to maintain and preserve a culture or tradition that has been around for a long time and is inherent to them. Preservation can be interpreted as an effort made by the community to ensure that culture remains preserved and does not change from its original form (Azis, 2021; Islahudin et al., 2023; Sulha, 2020). Efforts to preserve *Rimpu* culture are in line with national policy as outlined in Law No. 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement, which affirms that local cultural expressions are part of the national identity that must be protected, developed, and utilized to strengthen the nation's identity. Various steps have been taken to preserve the *Rimpu* culture in facing the existing challenges.

".... If we look at the developments of the times, the challenge is indeed great because young people prefer modern clothing. As a result, *Rimpu* has become merely a complementary garment in major Bima events.... In my opinion, *Rimpu* can still be preserved if we start with families, schools, communities, and even the government. *Rimpu* must continue to be maintained and introduced to future generations so that they know it is part of the identity of the Bima people."

Various actors have sought to revitalise *Rimpu* as an emblem of Bima identity. Municipal and district governments stage *Rimpu* parades during Bima anniversary celebrations. While the cultural office organises events such as the *Rimpu* Festival to raise youth awareness about preserving local traditions. Preservation initiatives have extended into education: in 2016 SMA Negeri 1 *Woha* mandated *Rimpu* use across the school community and introduced curricular materials on *Rimpu*'s history and values (Khatimah et al., 2021). The school policy aims to revive *Rimpu* as a distinctive Bima cultural form and to inculcate its moral and historical meanings among students. Collectively, these measures seek not only formal recognition of *Rimpu* as cultural heritage but also its integration into contemporary identity formation for Bima women, positioning the practice as relevant to present-day social and cultural development.

The preservation of *Rimpu* culture has a positive impact on the formation of the identity of the younger generation of Bima. Although many of them are starting to be influenced by global culture, efforts to preserve *Rimpu* give them awareness of the importance of preserving local cultural heritage. *Rimpu* gives the younger generation of Bima a unique identity, which is not only based on religion but also on local wisdom. In schools, history and culture lessons begin to teach the importance of *Rimpu* as part of a cultural identity that should be proud of. Thus, *Rimpu* can be an important tool in instilling a sense of love for local culture and strong Islamic values among the younger generation.

Although efforts to preserve *Rimpu* have been made, there is still much room for improvement. The preservation of *Rimpu* culture, while well-intentioned, raises critical questions about the nature of heritage and the politics of cultural preservation. As noted above, festivalization and curriculum integration risk transforming *Rimpu* from a living practice into a folklorized symbol. This is not to reject preservation efforts but to insist that they be approached critically, with attention to the lived experiences and agency of the practitioners themselves.

Based on these findings and global best practices, this study recommends that the Bima Regency and City Governments enact a local regulation formally recognising *Rimpu* as Bima's intangible cultural heritage, mandating its protection, development, and transmission. This should encompass annual budget allocations for a permanent *Rimpu* Cultural Centre and preservation programmes, institutional coordination across relevant cultural, educational, and tourism offices, a *Rimpu* Cultural Preservation Index with annual public reporting, and explicit protection for the right to wear *Rimpu* in public and professional settings. The government should further pursue *Rimpu*'s nomination to UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, elevating its global profile and securing long-term state commitment to its preservation.

Second, to Educational Institutions: Systematically integrate *Rimpu* cultural values and history into the formal curriculum across all school levels in Bima. Implementation should be multi-subject (incorporating history, cultural arts, Islamic Religious Education, Civic Education, and local content subjects), supported by purpose-developed teaching materials, and assessed through standardized evaluation frameworks. All schools should establish annual *Rimpu* Cultural Days with active educational programming. Higher education institutions in Bima should establish dedicated research programs on *Rimpu* culture and support interdisciplinary theses and dissertations that contribute to the evidence base for preservation policy.

Third, to Cultural and Creative Economy Development Agencies: Establish a *Rimpu* Creative Economy Program providing grants, market access, and intellectual property protection for *tembe nggoli* weavers. Support the development of *Rimpu*-inspired contemporary fashion through design competitions, collaborations between traditional weavers and modern designers, and promotion through national and international fashion platforms. Develop *Rimpu* Village experiences as a flagship cultural tourism product, generating economic returns that can be reinvested in preservation programs. Pursue geographical indication (GI) certification for *tembe nggoli* to protect its intellectual property and secure premium market positioning.

Fourth, to Civil Society Organizations: Formalize partnerships between government and women's organizations, traditional community groups, and the *Rimpu* cultural movement in program design and implementation. Support mentorship programs pairing young women with elder *Rimpu* practitioners. Develop digital documentation and promotion platforms—including dedicated social media channels, digital archives, and online education programs—to reach diaspora Bima communities, Indonesian youth audiences, and international audiences interested in Indonesian Islamic culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on these findings, this study concludes that *Rimpu* constitutes a distinctive form of religious identity for Muslim women in Bima. Made from two pieces of *tembe nggoli sarong*, *Rimpu* covers the *aurat* in two forms: *Rimpu Colo* (married women, face visible) and *Rimpu Mpida* (unmarried women, only eyes visible). Moving beyond descriptive functionalism, the study theorises *Rimpu* as a form of vernacular veiling—a localised materialisation of the global Islamic norm of modesty—drawing on Mahmood's (2011) account of embodied piety to show how Bima women actively cultivate themselves as pious Muslim subjects. It further reveals tension between *Rimpu* as a vernacular practice and the growing influence of the standardised, transnational *hijab*, prompting a heritage revival that risks folklorising a living practice.

From a global perspective, *Rimpu* shares similarities with veiling traditions in Turkey, the UK, Malaysia, and Iran, yet is distinctive in its use of locally woven, unstitched cloth. It operates as a symbolic boundary distinguishing Bima Muslim woman from secular others (Schnabel et al.,

2022), while the paradox of empowerment and constraint experienced by religious women in Turkey resonates with Bima women's experiences (Parmaksız, 2025); wearing *Rimpu* can further be understood as a liminal ritual producing sacred space and reinforcing collective identity (Isnaeni et al., 2025). This study identifies three policy gaps: the absence of legal recognition as intangible cultural heritage, poor integration into schooling, and insufficient economic assistance for weavers, addressed through five recommendations—legal registration, curriculum integration, economic empowerment, civil society alliances, and further research. The study makes three contributions: a theory of vernacular veiling that moves beyond the oppression-resistance dichotomy to highlight women's agency; a critical examination of the tension between preservation and folklorisation; and concrete policy proposals for *Rimpu*'s long-term preservation as a living practice rather than a static symbol.

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