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Veiling as Cultural Sovereignty: A Performative and Mediated Study of Rimpu in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

This study investigates *Rimpu*, the traditional veiled dress of Bimanese Muslim women in Eastern Indonesia, as a performative expression of piety, identity, and resistance within the interplay of Islamic values, local customs, and contemporary socio-cultural transformations. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, the research was conducted in Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. The study finds that *Rimpu* functions not only as a cultural-religious identity marker but also as a contested symbol shaped by generational reinterpretation, commodification in tourism and media, and diminishing everyday use among youth. While older women perceive *Rimpu* as a spiritual embodiment of *nuru* (modesty) and *maja* (shame), younger women increasingly view it as ceremonial, aesthetic, or impractical for modern life. Theoretically, this research contributes to Islamic gender studies and symbolic anthropology by extending Judith Butler's performativity and Talal Asad's embodied piety into a localized Muslim context, offering a non-Arab, peripheral case that challenges dominant narratives in Muslim fashion discourse. Practically, the findings call for policy interventions and educational models that move beyond folklorization and instead support intergenerational cultural transmission rooted in lived experience. The study's limitations include its regional scope, with a focus on female voices in coastal and semi-urban areas, and limited analysis of *Rimpu*'s digital representation. Future research should explore visual ethnography, class-based variations, and comparative dress practices across Eastern Indonesia to deepen understanding of local Islamic expressions under global cultural pressure.

Keywords: Rimpu; Cultural Identity; Spiritual Symbolism; Muslim Women; Social Transformation.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era of globalization, local cultures are not merely remnants of the past but have become active sites of identity negotiation and symbolic resistance (Jensen et al., 2011; McDowell, 2016). While global flows are often assumed to erode indigenous cultural boundaries, they can also stimulate localized assertions of difference and rootedness, especially among communities seeking to preserve their distinct values. One such compelling case is *Rimpu*, the traditional dress of Bimanese (Mbojo) women in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, which operates not only as a cultural identity marker but also as a vehicle for spiritual expression (Nisa, 2022; Sila, 2021)

Rimpu is composed of two main forms—*Rimpu Mpida*, which veils the face except for the eyes, and *Rimpu Colo*, which is more open and typically worn by married women (Anisah et al., 2024; Rahmi, 2022). More than a visual aesthetic, *Rimpu* embodies layered meanings of modesty (*nuru*), shame (*maja*), and social status, passed down intergenerationally through oral traditions and adat structures (Nisa, 2022). While often associated with Islamic values, *Rimpu* remains distinct from Arab-centric Islamic attire such as the *abaya* or *niqab*, situating it within a uniquely Southeast Asian cultural-Islamic synthesis (Fitriana & Suharno, 2019; Pratama, 2019)

Despite its rich cultural and religious significance, existing scholarship largely treats *Rimpu* as a static and romanticized artifact. Much of the literature remains descriptive and conservationist (Aulia, 2013; Nurdin, 2021), rarely interrogating how *Rimpu* functions as a symbolic field where Bimanese women negotiate religious norms, gender roles, and bodily autonomy. Theoretical discussions on *Rimpu*'s performativity, agency, and symbolic politics are noticeably absent in both Indonesian and global Islamic dress literature. This oversight risks essentializing *Rimpu* as folkloric tradition, thereby detaching it from the lived experiences and socio-political dynamics of contemporary Muslim women.

This study addresses that gap by critically investigating how *Rimpu* is reinterpreted in the context of commodification, digital mediatization, and generational change (Tamrin, 2025; Windi Baskoro Prihandoyo, 2022). Drawing on Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Talal Asad's conception of embodied piety (Dadze, 2017; Bekkaye, 1990; Asad, 1993), this research frames *Rimpu* as a social performance—an enactment of piety, identity, and honor embedded in the liminal space between Islam, adat, and modernity.

By situating *Rimpu* as both a symbolic and discursive practice, the study contributes to contemporary debates in Islamic gender studies, visual culture, and the sociology of dress. It questions whether *Rimpu* remains a living embodiment of local Islamic wisdom or has been reduced to a nostalgic object of cultural branding. By interrogating *Rimpu* as both a cultural signifier and a site

of spiritual expression, this study contributes to theoretical discourses on Islamic gender identity, while offering an empirical case that exemplifies the negotiation of tradition and modernity in peripheral Muslim communities.

2. Literature Review

Rimpu: A Cultural Symbol and Local Spirituality

Rimpu is the traditional dress of Mbojo women, carrying profound aesthetic and symbolic significance within the Bimanese society of West Nusa Tenggara. From a symbolic cultural perspective, Rimpu is understood as a system of signs that not only covers the body but also represents identity, modesty, and religious expression among Muslim women. Its two main forms—Rimpu Mpida and Rimpu Colo—indicate differences in social status and spirituality based on age and marital status. Octavianingsih (2019) affirms that Rimpu should not only be viewed visually but also as a manifestation of social values within the structures of customary society and local Islam. Compared to other forms of Muslim dress such as the abaya, chador, and niqab, Rimpu displays characteristics unique to Eastern Indonesia, closely tied to indigenous customs. The Islamic interpretation embedded in Rimpu is not an imported Middle Eastern concept, but rather a synthesis with local norms and values. This demonstrates that symbols of female piety are not globally uniform but emerge from the dialectic between religion and culture.

When examined in comparison to other Muslim modest clothing practices around the world—such as the abaya in the Middle East, the chador in Iran, the modern hijab in Southeast Asia, and the niqab or burqa in South Asia—Rimpu offers not only aesthetic distinction but also deep sociocultural meanings. Rimpu is not merely a symbolic adoption of Islamic teachings on modesty; it is the outcome of local interpretation that merges Islamic values with the customary structures of Bimanese society. This difference is crucial to challenging the widespread assumption that Muslim women's clothing is universal, linear, and uniform; in contrast, it is highly contextual, shaped by the interplay of religion, culture, and local women's agency.

Global discourses on Muslim women's dress often present polarized views: either as a patriarchal tool of oppression or as a symbol of resistance to Western hegemony. Such a dichotomy oversimplifies the complex realities experienced by Muslim women in diverse communities. Rimpu, for instance, cannot easily be reduced to categories of "oppression" or "liberation." Rather, it should be read as a dynamic performance of identity, where Bimanese women negotiate their position within religious values, customary norms, age, and social status.

Works such as Visibly Muslim Tarlo, (2010) and Lewis (2015) analyses of Islamic fashion suggest that Muslim women's identities are shaped through reflective clothing practices that are often ideologically incoherent. In this context, Rimpu functions as a "Wardrobe of Negotiation," a space where women

negotiate the meaning of their identity within local power relations. For example, the difference between Rimpu Mpida and Rimpu Colo is not only about marital status but also about multilayered articulations of modesty. This implies that the meanings of veiled dress are not singular but are produced through specific social norms, not merely religious dogma.

Global academic discourse often fails to capture such diversity because it tends to rely on broad categories like "Islamic dress" or "veiling," which homogenize Muslim women's experiences. Rimpu challenges such frameworks by demonstrating how veiling can emerge from deeply rooted local cultural systems rather than from ideological imposition. In this sense, Rimpu is not only a symbol of piety or social surveillance but also a form of cultural sovereignty, where Bimanese women actively preserve, interpret, and modify the values they hold dear.

This study addresses that gap by framing Rimpu not as a static traditional garment but as a field of social interpretation. Rimpu is analyzed symbolically as a performance of piety, honor, and cultural identity among Bimanese Muslim women. Through a symbolic-cultural lens and identity theory, the study positions Rimpu as an evolving, negotiated, and even commodified religious and cultural expression. This approach opens the possibility to understand Rimpu as a mode of social articulation through which women confront modernity and globalization. The article contributes to the literature on Islamic cultural symbols by offering a concrete example from a peripheral region. Rimpu becomes a window through which to understand how local Islam is practiced and interpreted within highly contextual and cultural frameworks. It is a contribution to the study of Muslim women's dress that does not dichotomize religiosity from local culture.

Rimpu and Gender Identity in Bimanese Muslim Society

This study highlights several main findings. Rimpu as Cultural and Religious Identity: it is seen not merely as traditional attire, but as a symbol of Bimanese women's honor and a local form of religious expression in Islam. This indicates that Rimpu symbolizes the ideal woman according to Bimanese social values (Octavianingsih, 2019). While this statement is important, it should be emphasized that Rimpu serves a dual identity function. It becomes a meeting point between local customary norms and Islamic religious values. Women's identities in Bimanese society are shaped by cultural mechanisms like Rimpu, which internalize values of honor, modesty, and obedience—not only to religious standards but also to long-standing social norms. In other words, Rimpu is not merely clothing but a performative identity involving the body, public space, and moral codes.

Referring to Rimpu as a symbol of the "ideal woman" requires a critical examination of the concept of "ideal." Does it mean merely conforming to religious and social norms, or does it also include agency in self-expression? In many Muslim societies, the construction of the ideal woman is often normative

and patriarchal. Thus, Rimpu must be viewed dynamically: on one hand reflecting dominant norms, but on the other offering interpretive space for Bimanese women to reconfigure their identities amid social change.

In today's context, where Muslim women face the currents of global cultural flows, Rimpu becomes a site of tension between preserving tradition and responding to change. How does Rimpu survive the dominance of global fashion trends or the rise of modern *syar'i* fashion? Is it still seen as a spiritual choice, or has it been reduced to a folkloristic symbol? Critical inquiry must address these dynamics, especially how young Bimanese women respond to Rimpu as both cultural heritage and contemporary Muslim identity.

Previous research by Nuraeni et al. (2023) highlights Rimpu as a marker of honor and identity protection in public spaces. However, such studies often adopt normative perspectives that emphasize Rimpu as cultural preservation and positive social control. Few studies explicitly examine how young Bimanese women currently understand and adapt Rimpu in their daily lives shaped by social media, global fashion trends, and increased social mobility. There is also a lack of generational perspectives in analyzing Rimpu—how different age groups interpret the same symbol differently. Social change often occurs through intergenerational shifts in perception. Such approaches are crucial to demonstrating that symbols like Rimpu are not monolithic but are polyvocal and contextual. Hence, intersectional and generational perspectives are highly relevant.

Earlier studies tend to idealize Rimpu as a sacred heritage without much room for critique or questioning. This risks obscuring the social pressures, stigma, or identity dilemmas faced by women who wear Rimpu. Islamic feminist approaches stress the importance of listening to women's experiences as subjects, not just as cultural objects. Moreover, the relationship between cultural symbols and women's bodily experience is often overlooked. How do women feel when wearing Rimpu? Do they feel protected, restricted, or empowered? These questions are rarely asked in previous research. A new approach that is sensitive to women's experiences is therefore necessary.

This article responds to this gap by exploring how Bimanese women interpret Rimpu as a practice of identity in contemporary settings. Through sociological and gender studies perspectives, this research unpacks how Rimpu becomes a symbol that is continuously reinterpreted. It situates women as active agents in understanding and adapting Rimpu. It is no longer seen as mere heritage but as a living discourse embedded in daily life. This study opens discussion on how religious and customary values meet, conflict, or synergize in dress symbolism. The result is a richer understanding of how piety, honor, and women's agency are constructed and negotiated through local dress practices. This is an important contribution to gender and Islamic studies in the Indonesian local context.

The Commodification of Rimpu in the Sociopolitical and Media Landscape

Ahmad (2023) study sharply illustrates how Rimpu undergoes a shift in meaning along with sociopolitical dynamics. Initially a symbol of piety and female identity in Bima, Rimpu has now been commodified in both cultural and local political realms. It is no longer limited to religious modesty but has become a visual symbol packaged in narratives of nostalgia, fashion, and even political identity campaigns. Ahmad's perspective aligns with Douglas Holt's (2004) theory of cultural branding, where local cultural symbols are mobilized in the construction of collective identity by power actors. In this context, Rimpu can be seen as a cultural artifact repositioned for specific purposes, such as signifying authenticity in tourism events or piety in female political campaigns.

In addition, critical approaches like that of Abu-Lughod (2002) emphasize how narratives about female piety are often instrumentalized in cultural politics without genuinely incorporating women's voices. The transformation of Rimpu into a commodified or folklorized object can be viewed as a form of silent domestication of its spiritual and historical value.

This commodification reveals how traditional attire becomes a contested object among cultural heritage, religious expression, and political messaging. Therefore, studies of Rimpu must move beyond cultural and symbolic dimensions to also include political-economic concerns: who benefits from Rimpu's popularity, and how is its local meaning renegotiated in spaces of power?

Most previous studies on Rimpu used qualitative-ethnographic, semiotic-hermeneutic, and cultural-historical approaches, focusing on its symbolic meaning, clothing aesthetics, and the acculturation process between culture and Islam. However, important gaps remain. First, intersectional studies are scarce and have yet to connect Rimpu with variables such as social class, age, or education. Second, comparative approaches are lacking, especially those that position Rimpu within the global landscape of Muslim veiling practices. Third, visual-critical perspectives are nearly absent, despite the fact that Rimpu's mediatization through social media may significantly alter its cultural and religious meanings.

Theoretically, these issues can be classified under several frameworks: (1) Cultural Identity and Ethnicity Theory, to explain how Rimpu symbolizes Bimanese local identity; (2) Gender and Representation Theory, to examine how Rimpu constructs and is constructed by perceptions of women in the public sphere; (3) Cultural Acculturation Theory, to analyze the meeting point between Islamic values and local culture in material forms like dress; and (4) Visual Culture and Mediatization Theory (still underexplored), to study the transformation of Rimpu's meanings in the digital era.

Previous research offers strength in highlighting the symbolic contextuality of Rimpu and its contribution to local cultural preservation. However, weaknesses lie in the overly descriptive nature of many studies, which

fail to capture contemporary dynamics, especially mediatization, intersectionality, and cultural hybridity. The contribution of this present study lies in expanding and deepening prior research by focusing on Rimpu's changing symbolic-cultural dimension in the modern digital and social era. This study corrects the perception of Rimpu as a homogeneous symbol and supplements earlier literature with a more interdisciplinary and critical perspective.

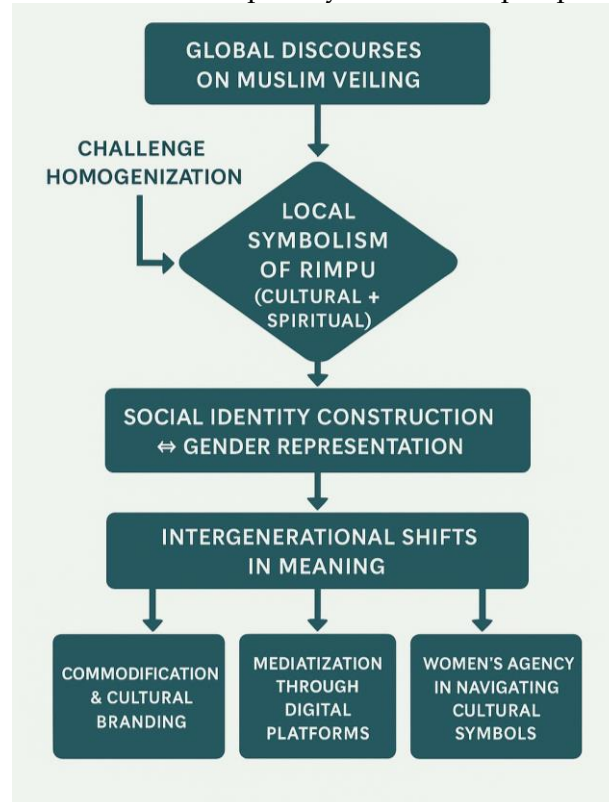


Figure 2.1. Framework of Cultural Identity and Symbolic Negotiation

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach to investigate the symbolic, cultural, and religious meanings embedded in the practice of wearing *Rimpu* among Bimanese Muslim women in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Ethnography is chosen for its ability to access the emic perspective of local actors, allowing the researcher to explore how *Rimpu* functions not merely as traditional attire but as a dynamic site of identity construction, modesty performance, and cultural negotiation. Fieldwork was conducted in Bima Regency, a region where *Rimpu* remains both preserved and transformed amid modern influences. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, including visual archives and digital media. Participants were purposively selected from four categories: women of various ages who wear *Rimpu*, cultural experts, religious and customary leaders, and youth who reinterpret *Rimpu* in contemporary

contexts. Thematic analysis was used to interpret coded data within frameworks of cultural identity, gender representation, and religious symbolism, with validity ensured through triangulation, member checks, and critical reflection on researcher positionality. As a cultural insider with scholarly training, the researcher maintained analytic distance while leveraging cultural familiarity to access nuanced meanings. Limitations include a focus on coastal and urban populations, limited inclusion of male perspectives, and minimal semiotic engagement with digital representations. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed through informed consent, anonymization, and participatory validation with local stakeholders to ensure that the research remains contextually authentic, ethically responsible, and academically robust.

4. Result

Rimpu as an Expression of Bimanese Cultural Identity

Participant observation conducted during customary events—such as the mass *Rimpu* ritual at the *Rimpu Mpida Festival* and in daily interactions at Woha traditional market—reveals that *Rimpu* is still worn by elderly women, particularly in formal and ritual contexts. These women are often seen wearing *Rimpu Mpida*, which involves intricately wrapped cloth covering the face, while older women tend to prefer *Rimpu Colo*. In non-ceremonial settings, *Rimpu* has become increasingly rare, except during visits to mosques or pilgrimages to ancestral graves. Its use is marked by strong symbolic awareness: the act of wearing *Rimpu* is performed slowly and reverently, accompanied by bodily expressions of respect. Observations also suggest that *Rimpu* serves as a visual code for distinguishing age, social status, and communal roles among women. It is not merely clothing, but a ritualized visual practice that regulates the body within the social space.

Interviews with five older female informants (aged 50–70) revealed that *Rimpu* is viewed as an inheritance from their mothers. Faridah (63), a female customary leader from Kalampa Village, stated: “We wear *Rimpu* because we were taught that shame is a woman’s fortress.” For her, *Rimpu* is not simply a dress code, but an embodiment of the values of *maja* (shame) and *nuru* (respect). Several informants described these moral values as intergenerational, functioning as markers of women’s dignity. *Rimpu* is consciously used as protection against social judgment. One informant, Musyarrafah (58), recounted that not wearing *Rimpu* in her youth would have invited collective condemnation from her family. These narratives highlight that *Rimpu* is an emotionally internalized identity, not just a formal cultural expectation.

The Transformation of Rimpu's Values in the Modern Era

Observation conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Bima and Mbojo University found that only two out of thirty female students wore *Rimpu* during campus activities—and even then, in modified forms, paired with trousers and modern accessories. On social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, the trend of *rimpu aesthetic* frames *Rimpu* primarily as a visual accessory for cultural content rather than for daily wear or spiritual expression. *Rimpu* is frequently featured in pre-wedding photoshoots, tourism campaigns, and creative content with “Back to Tradition” themes. These practices indicate a symbolic shift in function—from spiritual-expressive to visual-commodified.

Interviews with seven young women (aged 17–30) revealed that most perceive *Rimpu* as “a beautiful outfit for cultural events,” but “impractical for college or work.” Lela (23), a student from Bima studying at the University of Mataram, remarked: “I love *Rimpu*, but it feels more like a tool for cultural campaigns than everyday wear.” Other informants expressed pride in *Rimpu* but admitted to wearing it only during special events. Some also expressed critical awareness—Rani (19) shared that while she values *Rimpu*, her social environment “pressures us to conform to more global fashion trends.” These insights reflect the tension between local identity and aspirations for social mobility.

Rimpu in the Face of Modern Culture and the Romance of the Past

During events such as the *Dana Mbojo Cultural Parade* and *Rimpu Carnival*, *Rimpu* becomes a visual centerpiece, worn by models, civil servants, and school delegations in uniformed formats. In contrast, it is virtually absent from everyday public spaces such as shopping centers and office buildings. Observation at an embroidery workshop in Penatoi subdistrict revealed that demand for *Rimpu* peaks during cultural festivals, with only occasional personal orders throughout the rest of the year. This suggests that *Rimpu* has become a seasonal cultural product. While it is promoted with the slogan of “preserving culture,” its foundational spiritual and moral values are rarely emphasized.

Interviews with two *Rimpu* artisans, one official from the Bima Department of Culture, and two local cultural activists revealed that *Rimpu* is now mobilized more as a visual identity marker than as a customary practice. One artisan, Dewi, noted: “*Rimpu* gets popular during festivals. But after that, it’s packed away again.” A staff member from the Department of Culture acknowledged that *Rimpu* has been incorporated into cultural tourism branding with annual budget allocations. However, only one of five informants mentioned the existence of educational programs aimed at revitalizing *Rimpu*’s spiritual values in schools. These findings suggest that *Rimpu* is at risk of being reduced to a hollow cultural icon—a case of folklorization, where it is revived as a symbolic image of the past, detached from its lived moral and religious significance.

5. Discussion

Rimpu as a Cultural Expression of Bimanese Identity

Rimpu has long been worn by Bimanese women as a symbol of honor, modesty, and spiritual reverence for ancestral values. This clothing practice is governed not only by customary law but also reflects a woman's social and religious status. *Rimpu Mpida* and *Rimpu Colo* serve as visual markers of a social structure transmitted intergenerationally. Interviews with cultural figures reveal that wearing *Rimpu* is part of a collective moral sentiment known as *maja*, signifying piety and dignity. In traditional ceremonies, *Rimpu* serves as a cultural identifier that distinguishes Bimanese women from other groups. While in rural areas the use of *Rimpu* is maintained as an expression of adherence to local norms, in urban contexts, its symbolic meanings are increasingly questioned by younger generations.

Rimpu may be read as “clothing that speaks”—a bodily inscription of collective values and social narratives. More than a garment, it is a symbolic system that conveys identity, spirituality, and relational codes. Its usage signifies a harmonious synthesis between Islamic values and indigenous customs, producing a locally-rooted expression of Muslim femininity that challenges the global uniformity of modest dress. Bimanese Muslim women interpret *aurat* through distinct cultural readings, engaging not only with Islamic textuality but also with normative adat. Thus, *Rimpu* operates as a contextual expression of religiosity rather than a doctrinal uniform. The identity of Bimanese women, therefore, emerges as a complex and dynamic articulation of cultural agency.

The cultural significance of *Rimpu* emerges from the historical encounter between Islamization, patriarchal social structures, and local systems of value. As Islam entered Bima, acculturation occurred not through erasure of tradition, but via synthesis—embedding Islamic modesty within pre-existing cultural forms. *Rimpu* became a widely accepted standard of propriety because it aligned with both religious prescriptions and indigenous notions of female honor. However, this integration also upheld rigid gender norms, positioning women within a framework of visual piety. The transmission of *Rimpu*'s values occurs through family institutions, ritual practices, and visual representations in public spaces, ensuring its continuity amid changing times.

From Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology, *Rimpu* functions as a cultural symbol mediating moral, religious, and social meanings. It is not culturally neutral; it communicates messages about the ideal place and conduct of women in society. Judith Butler's theory of performativity also applies here—by wearing *Rimpu*, Bimanese women do not merely “represent who they are” but “become who they are” through collective norms. *Rimpu*, then, is a performative arena through which female bodies enact localized forms of piety. This affirms the view that gender identity and religious subjectivity are not fixed essences but are produced through socio-cultural practices. It positions *Rimpu* as both a cultural instrument and a medium of female agency.

Many previous studies have portrayed *Rimpu* merely as a visual cultural product, lacking engagement with its deeper sociological dimensions. Dominant

approaches tend to be descriptive and normative, often romanticizing *Rimpu* within a framework of heritage without critically addressing its patriarchal underpinnings or symbolic contestations. Some studies even essentialize *Rimpu* as a singular symbol of piety, overlooking its contextual and diverse manifestations. There is a lack of interpretive-symbolic analysis that treats *Rimpu* as a dynamic social text. The absence of gender and cultural theory has contributed to a shallow understanding of this practice. Accordingly, this study challenges such limitations through an interdisciplinary reading that foregrounds critical reflection.

This research contributes significantly by framing *Rimpu* not as a static symbol but as a continuously negotiated cultural expression. It reveals how *Rimpu* constitutes not just traditional attire but a cultural apparatus that shapes discourses of piety, honor, and the social position of women in Bimanese society. The study also expands the discourse on Muslim women's dress, which often centers on modern hijab, by adding a richly local example from Eastern Indonesia. Employing symbolic and performative approaches, it deepens the understanding of how Islamic identity is constructed contextually. Furthermore, it positions *Rimpu* as part of Indonesia's Islamic cultural geography, contributing to broader configurations of Islamic expression. The study, therefore, holds significance for the development of Islamic anthropology and gender studies.

Practically, this research offers insights for cultural policymakers and local educators to reposition *Rimpu* not merely as ceremonial dress but as part of character education. Schools and cultural institutions could integrate *Rimpu*'s values into contextual moral education. Theoretically, the study proposes a new framework for understanding female cultural symbols in localized Islamic settings as performative arenas. Thus, the meaning of *Rimpu* is not monolithic but open to reinterpretation and cultural dialectics. The study's implications for gender scholarship are also notable, highlighting how dress norms function as instruments of both affirmation and social control. *Rimpu* may be viewed as a form of "cultural obligation" fused with religious meaning, yet allowing for negotiation and reinterpretation. It reinforces that Islamic symbols in society cannot be detached from their local and historical dynamics.

Nevertheless, the study is limited by its geographical focus on rural Bima, which does not fully represent the urban or diasporic dynamics of *Rimpu*. It also does not explore in depth the visual representation of *Rimpu* in digital media, although such mediatization increasingly influences public perceptions of the symbol. Future research should explore how *Rimpu* is reconstructed on social media by younger generations. Visual culture and digital ethnography approaches would enrich the analysis of *Rimpu*'s symbolic and narrative transformation in digital spaces. Intersectional inquiry is also needed to explore how social class and education influence women's engagement with *Rimpu*. Comparative studies across Eastern Indonesia could reveal broader patterns of interaction between local dress and Islamic symbolism. Future scholarship is

encouraged not only to extend this work but to deepen its theoretical reach through more inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches.

The Transformation of Rimpu's Cultural Value in the Modern Era

Once a daily attire symbolizing modesty and religiosity, *Rimpu* is now more commonly seen during ceremonial events and cultural festivals. Among the younger generation, *Rimpu* no longer holds the same social-religious functions; instead, it has evolved into a symbol of local cultural aesthetics. Many young Bimanese women prefer modern forms of Muslim fashion—such as hijab and *gamis*—which are perceived as more practical and aligned with global trends. As a result, *Rimpu* has shifted from a spiritual artifact to a folkloric symbol used primarily in representational or official contexts. While local governments frequently promote *Rimpu* as a cultural icon during state events, its everyday use has significantly declined. This indicates a disconnection between the symbol and the lived meaning it once held within the social fabric of Bimanese society. This transformation is shaped by the influx of modern values, the pervasive influence of social media, and changes in cultural consumption patterns.

The changing meaning of *Rimpu* reflects a broader shift in how traditional symbols are interpreted by contemporary society, particularly youth. What was once seen as part of a spiritual discipline and a marker of womanhood is now reduced to an externalized symbol—detached from its intrinsic religious and social values. While this transformation illustrates the adaptive nature of culture, it also raises concerns about the erosion of deeper meaning. For younger generations, *Rimpu* is no longer inherited through ancestral teachings but accessed via digital narratives, cultural promotions, and visual commodification. This illustrates how cultural meaning is not fixed but contingent upon the ways it is performed, displayed, and consumed.

Several factors contribute to this transformation—most notably globalization, mediatization, and lifestyle changes. The rise of global Muslim fashion has displaced *Rimpu* both functionally and symbolically. The practical appeal of modern attire such as instant hijabs and simplified dresses has rendered *Rimpu* less compatible with the demands of contemporary mobility. Simultaneously, social media has shaped the tastes and perceptions of young people, orienting them toward modern lifestyles. Moreover, the lack of educational efforts by local authorities has led to an emotional and cognitive disconnection between younger generations and the symbolic meaning of *Rimpu*. The transformation is also tied to the restructuring of social spaces, from tightly knit customary communities to more individualistic societies open to external influences. Hence, the shifting value of *Rimpu* is a direct outcome of broader transformations in contemporary social structures.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, the transformation of *Rimpu* can be understood as a shift in cultural habitus caused by changes in symbolic capital. Previously, *Rimpu* held high value within the symbolic economy of Bimanese society due to its association with honor and piety. Today, with the rise of

aesthetic capital and consumer logic, *Rimpu* has lost its hegemonic position and is re-signified in terms of marketable appeal. Stig Hjarvard's theory of cultural mediatization also helps explain how media reframe the interpretation of traditional values—including dress. In this light, *Rimpu* has become "disembedded" from its original cultural-religious context and reinserted into new symbolic domains such as tourism, fashion shows, and digital content. The shifting meaning of *Rimpu*, then, is part of a wider process of symbolic reconfiguration shaped by visual culture and market consumption.

Previous studies have largely failed to capture the contemporary dynamics in which *Rimpu* is being redefined. Most research has focused on preservation, aesthetics, or historical description, without analyzing how *Rimpu* is experienced by the younger generation. These descriptive approaches risk romanticizing cultural heritage while neglecting the lived realities of modernity. There is a lack of visual-critical perspectives or examinations of how *Rimpu* is constructed in digital spaces. No studies have yet approached *Rimpu* as a cultural product vulnerable to visual mediation, symbolic capitalism, and generational identity negotiation. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the changing value of *Rimpu* through the lens of contemporary cultural sociology. Challenging static interpretations, this research presents *Rimpu* as a living practice situated within ongoing negotiations of meaning.

The findings offer a new approach to understanding *Rimpu* as a cultural artifact in transition—no longer grounded in sacred meaning but increasingly shaped by commodification and popular aesthetics. This perspective enables a critical reading of value conflict between older and younger generations regarding traditional clothing symbols. *Rimpu* becomes a site of negotiation between traditional piety and millennial agency. This contributes to broader academic discourse on non-monolithic expressions of Islamic culture in peripheral regions. Through the integration of visual sociology and popular culture theory, the study fills a critical gap in research on religious dress and female symbolism in Eastern Indonesia. *Rimpu* is here positioned as a model case for analyzing symbolic transitions in contemporary Muslim societies.

Practically, these findings highlight the need for reflective and participatory cultural education. Cultural preservation should not be limited to symbolic display but involve active engagement with youth through adaptive designs, digital storytelling, and educational content. Programs that integrate *Rimpu* into school curricula or youth festivals could help embed cultural values in meaningful ways. Theoretically, this study contributes by incorporating visual culture, mediatization, and symbolic capital into the analysis of female religious dress. It also supports the broader agenda of decolonizing Islamic fashion discourse by centering non-central, local narratives. In this light, *Rimpu* offers a powerful challenge to dominant paradigms in Islamic and cultural studies.

However, this study is limited by its lack of direct observation of *Rimpu*'s representation in digital spaces such as TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube—

platforms where young people increasingly perform their identities. It also does not yet fully explore the role of the creative industry in shaping the symbolic economy of *Rimpu*. Future research could delve into how *Rimpu* is co-produced by local designers, small enterprises, and government institutions. Intersectional analysis that links *Rimpu* with social class, geography, and educational background is also needed. Digital ethnography could be employed to examine user-generated narratives, vlogs, and hashtag culture surrounding *Rimpu*. Comparative studies across Eastern Indonesia could further illuminate patterns in the transformation of local Islamic symbols. This research, therefore, lays the groundwork for more interdisciplinary and dynamic scholarship on cultural identity in the era of symbolic capitalism.

Rimpu in the Face of Modern Culture and the Romance of the Past

Amid rapid modernization, *Rimpu* has gradually lost its function as everyday attire and has become largely ceremonial and aesthetic. It is now predominantly worn during cultural festivals, traditional rituals, and tourism promotion events organized by local governments or communities. Young Bimanese women tend to opt for modern clothing, which they perceive as more practical and stylish. This shift indicates the desacralization and semantic narrowing of *Rimpu*, which no longer represents daily spiritual expression or social normativity, but rather serves as a nostalgic icon staged in selective moments. In such contexts, *Rimpu* functions more as a symbolic performance of memory than as a lived cultural practice. It has become a ritualized display that recalls a shared past—an icon of cultural identity that is performed more than embodied.

This phenomenon reflects how Bimanese society navigates modernity and globalization through symbolic strategies. The romance of the past becomes a cultural narrative employed to assert continuity amid rapid change. However, this romanticization is often cosmetic, preserving external forms while hollowing out intrinsic meanings. *Rimpu* thus transforms into a form of simulacra, as theorized by Jean Baudrillard, where cultural reality is replaced by hyperreal representations consumed in the public sphere. The spiritual ethics and social modesty once inherent in *Rimpu* are displaced by visual aesthetics. Culture, in this process, is aestheticized—its values diluted into images. Consequently, *Rimpu* now functions more as display heritage than as a living social norm.

This romanticism often emerges from a collective anxiety about the erosion of local cultural identity. As globalization brings universal values and digital technology dominates expressive spaces, Bimanese communities reproduce identity through familiar cultural symbols. Yet, without value internalization, such symbols risk becoming empty and fragmented. Preservation efforts that emphasize visuals over meaning have led to superficial understandings of *Rimpu* among the younger generation. Governmental promotion of *Rimpu* as a tourism icon accelerates its commodification, detaching it from its spiritual roots and relegating it to a static artifact in a cultural

showcase. The imbalance between preserving form and meaning has resulted in an alienation between youth and their heritage.

From Stuart Hall's perspective on cultural identity, *Rimpu* is transitioning from a state of *being* to *becoming*—its meanings are no longer fixed but continuously negotiated in modern contexts. It is now a site of identity articulation that is fluid and situational. Judith Butler's theory of performative culture also elucidates how *Rimpu*, as a performative act, not only represents identity but actively constitutes it. However, when the performance becomes divorced from its underlying values, it loses its normative function. As a symbolic practice, *Rimpu* requires ritual and social embeddedness to retain its authenticity. In this context, cultural romanticism operates as a survival strategy, but it does not necessarily ensure the full revitalization of the tradition.

Previous research often fails to differentiate between symbolic preservation and substantive preservation. Many studies focus on *Rimpu*'s visual, aesthetic, or historical dimensions without critically engaging with its contemporary social dynamics. The dominant romantic lens has rendered *Rimpu* a passive cultural object. There has been little attention to how *Rimpu* is utilized as a political tool or economic commodity, or how generational perceptions diverge in its interpretation as an identity symbol. This oversight has led to stagnation in the discourse, with conservative approaches emphasizing preservation over transformation. This study thus opens space for a more critical discussion on how cultural symbolism operates in public life.

This research offers a new perspective by distinguishing between the preservation of symbol and the preservation of meaning. By tracing the romanticization of *Rimpu*, the study reveals the tension between cultural identity and visual commodification. It argues that *Rimpu* should not be understood merely as a customary garment, but as a cultural dispositif—a flexible instrument deployed for spiritual, aesthetic, economic, and political purposes. Through an interdisciplinary approach—drawing from semiotics, cultural sociology, and visual anthropology—this study contributes significantly to the scholarship on religious symbolism and women's cultural identity in Eastern Indonesia. It not only fills empirical gaps but also strengthens the theoretical foundation for contemporary symbolic-cultural studies. *Rimpu* serves as a compelling case study for understanding how culture is sustained through narrative—not only through practice.

As times progress, *Rimpu* has undergone several adaptations to remain relevant and embraced in modern culture. Influenced by globalization, lifestyle changes, and aesthetic demands, *Rimpu* has evolved beyond traditional attire to inspire elements of contemporary fashion. These adaptations include its use in formal settings, simplified design modifications that retain traditional essence, and the integration of modern fabrics without abandoning signature Bimanese motifs such as handwoven textiles. Such innovations make *Rimpu* more

accessible and appealing to younger audiences, who are generally more receptive to stylistic evolution in fashion (Nurkamto et al., 2023)

To preserve *Rimpu* within a modern cultural context, synergistic efforts are needed among community leaders, educators, cultural authorities, and creative industries. One key strategy is cultural education, whereby *Rimpu* is introduced in formal school curricula as part of local heritage. Early exposure through education can help students appreciate its historical and ethical values. Complementary efforts include informal education through cultural workshops and intergenerational storytelling involving traditional leaders (Boyd, 2020). Another strategy is creative adaptation and digital promotion, such as incorporating *Rimpu* into fashion shows or social media campaigns with a modern-traditional theme. This would allow *Rimpu* to reach wider audiences, particularly digital-native youth, while preserving its core meaning. Collaborations with designers who respect its traditional character can also ensure that *Rimpu* continues to evolve without losing cultural integrity (Feener et al., 2015).

Lastly, the success of *Rimpu*'s preservation depends on policy support. Official recognition as an intangible cultural heritage, coupled with facilitation for small businesses producing *Rimpu* garments and textiles, would help safeguard its existence. Encouraging collaborations between local and global designers may also position *Rimpu* within broader fashion markets, enhancing its cultural relevance and economic sustainability (Nurnazmi et al., 2024; Samuel et al., 2022). In this sense, *Rimpu* preservation is not merely an act of safeguarding the past, but a strategic investment in the future of living heritage within the global cultural landscape.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that *Rimpu* is not merely traditional attire but a profound cultural, religious, and moral symbol of Bimanese womanhood. The first key finding demonstrates that *Rimpu* embodies deeply embedded values such as modesty (*nuru*), shame (*maja*), and honor, which are internalized within the social structure of Bima society. The second finding highlights a transformation of *Rimpu* in the modern era, where it has shifted from a normative spiritual practice to a ceremonial and visual symbol. The third finding draws attention to the romanticization and commodification of *Rimpu* as a nostalgic icon deployed in political and tourism settings. The strength of this research lies in its integrated approach, which weaves together cultural, religious, and sociological dimensions to analyze dress as a symbolic system. *Rimpu* emerges here as a rich social text that captures the ongoing dialectic between tradition and modernity. As such, *Rimpu* is not only a preserved cultural heritage but also a site of value articulation and identity formation for Muslim women in a localized context.

The primary contribution of this study is its expansion of *Rimpu* research from mere cultural description to critical symbolic and sociological analysis. It

presents an interdisciplinary approach that brings together cultural theory, gender studies, Islamic acculturation, and visual analysis. The bold attempt to frame *Rimpu* as a dynamic symbolic practice constitutes a significant novelty compared to earlier studies, which often remained normative and descriptive. This research also enriches the literature on the representation of Muslim women in Eastern Indonesia—a topic that remains underexplored. By distinguishing between the preservation of symbols and the preservation of meaning, the study deconstructs the ways *Rimpu* is re-negotiated by younger generations, the state, and the marketplace. It further underscores the importance of emic, experience-based approaches to reinterpreting traditional symbols. In doing so, *Rimpu* is not merely remembered as a relic of the past but re-read as a contemporary narrative of Bimanese womanhood.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The representation of *Rimpu* on social media and digital platforms has not yet been fully explored, leaving visual interactions in online spaces underexamined. Intersectional aspects such as class, education, and geography remain open for deeper analysis. Furthermore, the scope of this study is limited to the Bima community and does not include comparative perspectives with other Muslim communities that possess similar dress symbols. Future research is therefore recommended to adopt a digital visual ethnography approach to better capture the dynamics of *Rimpu* in virtual environments. It is also important to incorporate the voices of young women who do not wear *Rimpu* in order to avoid romanticized narratives of tradition. Additionally, the political economy of *Rimpu* deserves further exploration, particularly in terms of identifying who benefits from its cultural symbolization. Overall, *Rimpu* remains a strategic lens through which to understand the transformation of local Islamic culture within the currents of globalization and mediatization.

7. Reference

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