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Bridging Spirituality and Ecology: An Analysis of the Rimbo Concept in Minangkabau Culture

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Abstract

The global ecological crisis reveals the limitations of dominant technocratic paradigms, highlighting the need to explore alternative environmental ethics rooted in spiritual values and local wisdom. This study aims to analyze the concept of *rimbo* (forest) in Minangkabau culture as an ontological entity that integrates spirituality and ecology. Using a qualitative phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, this research was conducted in two nagari in West Sumatra, with data collected through in-depth interviews with five purposively selected informants (customary and religious leaders, community members) and participant observation. The results show that *rimbo* is conceptualized as a physical resource and a sacred cosmological bridge connecting the human, natural, and transcendent worlds. This sacredness fosters a collective ecological ethic, embedded in customary law and reinforced by Islamic principles governing sustainable management. This study contributes a novel analysis of *rimbo* as an ontological bridge, offering a grounded model of vernacular ecotheology. It significantly enriches the discourse on Islamic-Malay environmental ethics by demonstrating how local cosmology and religious doctrine can synergize to create a robust framework for sustainability.

Keywords: *Rimbo* Concept, Minangkabau, Ecotheology, Islamic-Malay Environmental Ethics, Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Menjembatani Spiritualitas dan Ekologi: Analisis Konsep Rimbo dalam Budaya Minangkabau

Abstrak

Krisis ekologi global menyingkap keterbatasan paradigma teknokratis yang dominan, menyoroti perlunya mengeksplorasi etika lingkungan alternatif yang berakar pada nilai-nilai spiritual dan kearifan lokal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep *rimbo* (hutan) dalam budaya Minangkabau sebagai sebuah entitas ontologis yang mengintegrasikan spiritualitas dan ekologi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologi-hermeneutik, penelitian ini dilakukan di dua nagari di Sumatera Barat, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima informan yang dipilih secara purposif (pemangku adat, tokoh agama, anggota masyarakat) serta observasi partisipatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *rimbo* dikonseptualisasikan bukan sekadar sebagai sumber daya fisik, melainkan sebagai jembatan kosmologis sakral yang menghubungkan dunia manusia, alam, dan transenden. Kesakralan ini menumbuhkan etika ekologis kolektif, yang tertanam dalam hukum adat dan diperkuat oleh prinsip-prinsip Islam, yang mengatur pengelolaan berkelanjutan. Studi ini menyumbangkan analisis baru tentang *rimbo* sebagai jembatan ontologis, menawarkan model ekoteologi vernakular yang membumi. Studi ini secara signifikan memperkaya wacana etika lingkungan Islam-Melayu dengan menunjukkan bagaimana kosmologi lokal dan doktrin agama dapat bersinergi untuk menciptakan kerangka kerja keberlanjutan yang kokoh.

Kata Kunci: Konsep *Rimbo*, Minangkabau, Ekoteologi, Etika Lingkungan Islam-Melayu, Pengetahuan Ekologi Tradisional.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary ecological crisis, a defining feature of the Anthropocene era, presents a formidable challenge to modern civilization, marked by accelerated climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation (Steffen et al., 2021). A global consensus has emerged in response, yet it predominantly favors a technocentric and managerial paradigm. Solutions are often centered on green technology, carbon market instruments, and international policy agreements. While valuable, this approach has fundamental limitations as it usually overlooks the deeper ethical and spiritual dimensions of the human-nature relationship (Rozzi, 2015). By framing nature as a collection of resources to be managed, the technocratic paradigm perpetuates a Cartesian dualism that fails to address the underlying values and worldviews that shape destructive environmental behaviors (Bardin & Ferrari, 2023). This shortcoming highlights the urgent need to explore alternative frameworks for environmental ethics, particularly from enduring spiritual traditions and local wisdom.

In the search for more holistic solutions, there is a growing recognition of the role of local wisdom and spirituality, which have long been marginalized in mainstream environmental discourse as "unscientific" or "primitive." Many indigenous and local communities possess sophisticated systems of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which are intricately woven into their cosmological beliefs, rituals, and social norms (Ntoko & Schmidt, 2021). These knowledge systems do not recognize a separation between humans and nature, but rather view them as an interconnected and interdependent whole. As Berkes (2018) TEK is not merely a static collection of facts but a dynamic and adaptive complex of knowledge,

practice, and belief. This necessitates an "epistemological turn" in environmental studies that acknowledges the validity of diverse knowledge forms and fosters a dialogue between modern science and indigenous wisdom to formulate a more inclusive and deeply rooted sustainability paradigm.

Amidst this global discourse, the concept of *rimbo* (dense forest) within West Sumatra, Indonesia's Minangkabau culture, offers a compelling case study. For the Minangkabau people, the meaning of *rimbo* transcends its physical definition. It is a complex socio-cosmological entity—a sacred space that is both a source of livelihood and an arena governed by customary law (*adaik*) and spiritual values. This worldview is encapsulated in the philosophy *Adaik Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (Custom is based on Sharia, Sharia is based on the Book of Allah), which integrates pre-Islamic wisdom, *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru* (Unfolding Nature is the Teacher), into an Islamic framework (Satria & Sahayu, 2022). Within this synthesis, the *rimbo* is perceived not as a mere collection of exploitable assets, but as a living entity, a manifestation of God's greatness, and a teacher of cosmic order and balance, guarded by spiritual entities and managed through communal principles (Abdullah, 2018).

In the broader Southeast Asian context, sacred forests have long been recognized as loci where cosmology, spirituality, and conservation intersect. Studies on holy groves in India (Chandran & Hughes, 1997; Sharma & Kumar, 2021), indigenous cosmologies in Africa (Lawi, 2025; Ntoko & Schmidt, 2025), and eco-cosmopolitan traditions among Native American communities (Chou, 2015) provide comparative perspectives that highlight the global resonance of *rimbo*. Within Malay Islamic studies, this resonates with the ways Islamic teachings, especially the

Qur'anic injunctions against *fasad* (corruption on earth) and the mandate of *khalifah fil ardh* (vicegerency on earth), were historically localized into Malay ecological ethics, creating a fusion of Islamic spirituality and indigenous cosmology (Almirzanah, 2020). Thus, *rimbo* can be understood not only as a Minangkabau institution but also as part of a wider Malay-Islamic tradition of environmental stewardship.

In the Indonesian context, earlier studies have discussed ecological wisdom in *Tidore* (Efendi et al., 2021). *Cérékang* (Wulandari, 2024). Studies on Minangkabau often focus on the cultural landscape (Gunawan et al., 2019), ecological considerations in *Kie* and *Mamangang* (Nasria et al., 2022), and customary sanctions in the prohibition of logging (Sipayung, 2019). However, these studies remain fragmented, tending to discuss isolated aspects such as customary law, philosophical values, or ritual practices. What is lacking is a comprehensive analysis of the *rimbo* as an ontological bridge connecting the material and spiritual realms in Minangkabau cosmology. This study uniquely conceptualizes the *rimbo* as a bridge, connecting spirituality and ecology in Minangkabau culture while placing it within the broader framework of Malay-Islamic environmental ethics—an area rarely explored in the existing literature.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the concept of *rimbo* as an integrative model that bridges spirituality and ecology in the Minangkabau tradition. It seeks to unpack how the cosmology, ethics, and social norms embedded in the *rimbo* concept provide a robust foundation for sustainable environmental practices. This article contends that *rimbo* is not merely an anthropological curiosity but a vital source of inspiration for contemporary ecotheological discourse and the development of effective community-based conservation models.

Ultimately, this research is expected to contribute to a more profound understanding of the central role of local wisdom in confronting the global ecological crisis.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological-hermeneutic design to explore the lived experience and profound meanings of the *rimbo* concept within Minangkabau culture. This design is ideal for understanding how *rimbo* is perceived, interpreted, and experienced by community members in their natural context (Creswell, 2013). The hermeneutic aspect was utilized to interpret cultural texts, including customary narratives and interview transcripts, to reveal the layered meanings of the human-nature-spirit relationship (Van Manen, 2016).

The research was conducted over three months, from January to March 2025, in two *nagari* (customary villages) in Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra: Nagari Kuranji Hilir and Nagari Sungai Buluh. These locations were selected because they maintain protected customary forest areas (*rimbo ulayat*) and have active customary institutions. A total of five key informants were selected through purposive sampling, chosen based on their specific knowledge and roles within the community. The informant categories included: two customary leaders (*Datuak* and *Niniak Mamak*), one local religious leader (*Ulama*), and two community members interacting with the *rimbo* daily.

Data were collected through a triangulation of three techniques: literature review, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow informants the flexibility to share their narratives and perspectives in detail. Each interview, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes,

was audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim in the Minangkabau language, and then translated into English by the research team for analysis. To ensure accuracy, a back-translation process was performed on key excerpts. Data analysis was conducted manually using a thematic approach to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data.

Several qualitative validity strategies were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Cross-verifying interviews, observations, and literature findings achieved data triangulation. Member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to two informants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations. An audit trail, consisting of detailed field notes, transcripts, and analytical memos, was maintained throughout the research process. Ethical considerations were paramount; all participants were informed about the research objectives and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from each informant before participating, and their identities were anonymized in this article to ensure confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ecological Spirituality

Ecological spirituality, often referred to in academic circles as ecotheology, is an interdisciplinary field examining the relationship between religious/spiritual beliefs and practices and environmental issues. Its emergence as a severe discipline can be traced to Lynn White, Jr.'s landmark 1967 essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," which controversially accused the Judeo-Christian tradition of being one of the ideological roots of an anthropocentric and exploitative attitude toward nature. (Kidwell, 2022; White, 1967).

Since then, ecotheological discourse has flourished as a defensive response by theologians and a constructive effort to rediscover the "green sources" of the world's religious traditions. (Koehrsen, 2022). At the heart of ecological spirituality is a rejection of the radical separation between humans and nature, and between the material world and the transcendent. He asserts that the universe is not merely a dead stage for human drama but a community of interconnected subjects, where each entity has intrinsic value and a right to exist. This concept goes beyond a merely utilitarian anthropocentric environmental ethic (nature is valuable because it is helpful to humans) to a more theocentric or ecocentric view, where God or the Sacred is believed to be present and manifest in and through nature (Hourdequin, 2021).

In this framework, the relationship between humans, nature, and the transcendent dimension is no longer seen as a linear hierarchy, but as a complex interweaving of reciprocal relations. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prominent Islamic philosopher, argues that the modern environmental crisis is rooted in the desacralization of nature by modern science (Nasr, 1996; Sayem, 2020). For him, nature is a sign from God, a second scripture that reveals spiritual truths when read with the eyes of the heart. Therefore, to destroy nature is to desecrate the sacred. Similar views are found in various traditions. In Buddhism, the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependent cause and effect) provides a philosophical basis for the awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings (Egger, 2023). Meanwhile, many indigenous spiritual traditions worldwide view the earth as "Mother Earth", a living entity to be respected and cared for, not conquered (Gyllenhaal, 2025). The role of these spiritual values becomes crucial in shaping sustainable

ecological practices. When nature is viewed as sacred, destructive, exploitative actions can no longer be justified solely based on economic gain. Spirituality provides a deeper motivational foundation than compliance with regulations or financial incentives. It fosters reverence, gratitude, and stewardship toward creation (Preston & Baimel, 2021). These attitudes are then translated into concrete practices, such as resource conservation, modest consumption patterns, and resistance to environmentally destructive development projects. Thus, ecological spirituality offers a robust ethical and motivational framework for sustainability practices.

Local Wisdom and Cultural Cosmology

¹⁰ Local wisdom represents the accumulation of knowledge, practices, and beliefs passed down from generation to generation in a community to maintain balance with its environment (Hiwasaki et al., 2014; Tengö et al., 2021). It is not static knowledge, but rather a dynamic, adaptive, and holistically integrated system in the socio-cultural life of the community. A symbolic anthropology approach becomes very relevant to understand how local wisdom, such as the concept of *rimbo*, operates. Clifford Geertz, in his influential work, defines culture as "webs of significance" woven by humans themselves (Susen, 2024). According to Geertz, the task of a cultural analyst is to interpret these webs of meaning to understand how a society gives meaning to its world. In the context of *rimbo*, the forest cannot be understood only from a botanical or economic perspective. It must be understood as a cultural symbol full of meaning, a text containing a narrative about the Minangkabau people's origins, identity, and cosmic order. These meanings are communicated through myths, rituals, proverbs, and customary prohibitions that collectively shape people's perceptions and

behavior towards forests (Handoko et al., 2024; Yenrizal et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Mircea Eliade's thinking about the sacred and the profane provides a sharper framework for analyzing the spiritual dimension of *rimbo*. Eliade argues that for religious humans, space is not homogeneous; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others (Eliade, 1957). These spaces become sacred because that is where *hierophany occurs*, namely, the appearance or manifestation of the holy. This holy space becomes the "center of the world", an ontological reference point that gives meaning and orientation to all human existence. *The rimbo*, with all its myths about its "guardians" and the forbidden zones, can be analyzed as a sacred space in Minangkabau cosmology. It serves as a local axis mundi that connects the human world with the upper world (sky/God) and the lower world (earth/ancestral spirits) (Hrp et al., 2022). The prohibition against cutting down certain trees or entering certain areas at certain times is not simply superstition, but a way of maintaining the integrity of the sacred space, an acknowledgement that humans are not absolute masters of nature.

The Minangkabau custom itself functions as a comprehensive ecological knowledge system. Customs regulate human relations (*adaik nan sabana adaik*) and human relations with nature. The philosophy of "*Nature Takambang Jadi Guru*" is fundamental (Nahak, 2022). The regularity of natural cycles, ecosystem resilience, and the principle of balance are models for social and moral order. Customary proverbs often use natural metaphors to convey ethical values, for example, "*cabiak baju di dado, munculan kulik nan putiah*" (tear the shirt on the chest, reveal white skin), which teaches transparency and honesty, can also be interpreted as a call not to hide the damage done to nature (Datuak Rang Kayo Tumbagindo, 2025). The

management system of *customary land*, including *rimbo*, is strictly regulated by *niniak mamak* (customary leader) through deliberation (Ibrahim, 2020). These rules, which include the division of forest zones (e.g., *rimbo larangan* or customary protected forest, and *rimbo simpanan* or reserve forest), indicate the existence of a sophisticated ecological zoning system long before the concept was known in modern forestry science (Afrianti, 2020). Thus, Minangkabau custom, enriched by Islamic values, provides a solid cosmological and legal framework for sustainable environmental management practices, with *rimbo* as its primary locus.

Rimbo as a Cosmological Entity

The results of field research and literature studies consistently show that *rimbo* in the Minangkabau community's conception is not just a stretch of vegetation, but a living and inhabited cosmological entity. It is a sacred space that marks the boundary between the ordered world (*nagari*) and the wild world full of supernatural powers. This sacredness is mainly manifested in the deeply rooted belief in the existence of "*penunggu rimbo*". These entities, often referred to by various names such as *inyiak*, *siamang*, or *urang bunian*, are believed to be spiritual beings that inhabit large trees, water sources, caves, and specific points in the forest (Putra & Meigalia, 2019). They are not inherently evil entities but guardians of the balance of nature who will be angry if their habitat is disturbed or unwritten rules are violated. An informant, a *datuak* (leader of the clan) in Nagari Kuranji Hilir, said:

"*Rimbo itu ado nan punyo. Bukan punyo kito sajo. Ado 'urang aluih' nan manjago. Kalau kito masuk, kito harus 'minta izin', sampaikan salam. Jangan sombong, jangan mangecek kumuah (berkata kotor). Kalau ado kayu nan nio diambiak, itu harus untuak kaparaluan basamo, sudah dimusyawarahkan. Kalau serakah, bisa*

'dikecewakan'-nyo kito. Bisa sasak jalan pulang, bisa sakik." (The forest is owned by someone. It's not just ours. There are 'spirits' who guard it. If we enter, we must 'ask permission' and say hello. Don't be arrogant, don't say dirty words. If wood is to be taken, it must be for the common good, as discussed. If we are greedy, we can be 'disappointed'. We can get lost, we can get sick (Datuak Bandaro Itam, 2025).

This narrative, found in various variations across the research sites, is not simply superstition. From a hermeneutic perspective, it functions as a highly effective social and ecological control mechanism. Belief in the existence of these non-human "guardians" instills a deep sense of respect and caution. It compels humans not to act arbitrarily. Symbolically, "asking for permission" is an acknowledgment that humans are not absolute owners, but only one part of a larger ecological community (Kurnia et al., 2024). This concept directly challenges the anthropocentric paradigm that underlies modern environmental exploitation. Fear of supernatural sanctions (*kualat* or *tulak*) becomes a more substantial psychological barrier than monetary fines or the threat of imprisonment in the state legal system (Alandra et al., 2018).

The sacredness of *rimbo* is also reinforced through a series of customary narratives, myths, and ecological taboos. There is a strict prohibition (*pantang larangan*) against cutting down certain trees considered the "home" or dwelling place of spirits, such as large banyan trees or certain trees with spiritual value. Water sources in *Rimbo* are considered the center of life, and their sanctity is maintained; polluting them is considered a major sin against nature and society. There is also a taboo against hunting certain animals out of season or using destructive methods, such as poison. Myths about people who get lost or disappear in the rainforest because they violate taboos serve as cautionary tales

passed down from generation to generation to instill ecological ethics from an early age (Febriani & Murtiningsih, 2022). These taboos often have a strong rational basis when analyzed from a functional ecology perspective. For example, large trees prohibited from being cut are usually keystone species essential in maintaining ecosystem structure and water availability (Asmin, 2020). These narratives and myths are not irrational knowledge, but rather ecological knowledge encoded in symbolic and spiritual language, an embodiment of what Eliade calls sacred space that manifests the order of the cosmos.

Social Norms and Ecological Ethics in Rimbo

The management of *rimbo* in Minangkabau society is not left to individuals, but is regulated through a complex and collective customary system. *The rimbo* is part of *the customary land*, namely communal land whose ownership is in the hands of the clan or tribe, and its management is under the authority of *niniak mamak* as the customary leader (Ibrahim, 2020). The fundamental principle in the management of *customary land* is deliberation for consensus. Every critical decision concerning *rimbo*, such as clearing land for agriculture or taking wood to construct public facilities (for example, a traditional house or mosque), must go through a deliberation process involving all clan members and led by the *datuak*. In an observation at a customary meeting, the researcher witnessed how a request from a clan member to take wood from the *rimbo simpanan* (reserve forest) was discussed in depth. The considerations concerned not only the individual's needs but also the ecological impact, the availability of resources for future generations, and compliance with customary rules. Decisions were not taken unilaterally, but through a consensus prioritizing the

common good (*maslahah*).

This collective system instills an ethic of shared responsibility. Damage to *the rimbo* is a loss for one person and the entire clan and village. This collectivity is also reflected in the system of social sanctions for violators. Violations of the *rimbo* management rules, such as cutting down in the *rimbo larangan* (customary protected forest) or selling forest products for personal gain without permission, will be subject to customary sanctions. These sanctions can vary, from reprimands, customary fines (for example, handing over a goat to be cooked and eaten together as a symbol of restoring harmony), to the most severe sanctions in the form of social exclusion (*dibuang sapanjang adaik*). This social sanction is often more feared than formal legal sanctions because it concerns a person's self-esteem and social status within their community. This mechanism shows that Minangkabau customs have a strong endogenous legal apparatus to enforce their ecological norms.

This practice of nature conservation is further strengthened by its integration with Islamic religious values. *Adaik Philosophy Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* is the theological basis for environmental ethics. The concept of *khalifah fil ardh* (God's representative on earth) in Islam is interpreted locally as a mandate to protect and manage nature, including *rimbo*, with complete trust (Tarigan et al., 2024). A local cleric who was interviewed stated:

"Merusak hutan itu sama dengan mengingkari nikmat Allah. Dalam Al-Quran jelas dikatakan, janganlah kamu membuat kerusakan di muka bumi. Rimbo itu sumber air, sumber udara bersih, sumber kehidupan. Menjaganya adalah ibadah. Adat kita mengajarkan cara menjaganya, dan syariat memberikan landasan imannya (Destroying forests is tantamount to denying God's blessings. The Quran clearly states, "Do not cause corruption on the

earth." Forests are a source of water, clean air, and life. Protecting them is an act of worship. Our customs teach us how to protect them, and Sharia provides the foundation for our faith)." (Kuniang, 2025).

This view shows no dichotomy between custom and religion in ecological practices. Both are mutually reinforcing. Customary rules about not being greedy (*tamak*) and being economical (*hemat*) in utilizing forest products are in line with Islamic teachings on the prohibition of excess (*israf*). The principle of deliberation in custom resonates with the concept of *shura* in Islam. Ecological ethics in managing the *rimbo* are rooted in pre-Islamic customary cosmology and strengthened and given new meaning by Islamic teachings, creating a solid and relevant synthesis.

Rimbo as an Integrative Model of Spirituality and Ecology

Analysis of *rimbo* as a cosmological entity and an arena of social norms shows its function as a strong "bridge" between spirituality and ecology. It is a locus where the abstract (beliefs, values, cosmology) meets the concrete (natural resource management practices). The *rimbo* effectively connects three fundamental domains: the human world (*nagari*), the wild world, and the transcendent world (God and spiritual beings). This bridge is not static, but dynamic, where the three domains interact and influence each other. Belief in *penunggu rimbo* (spiritual dimension) gives rise to an attitude of respect and caution (ethics), which is then manifested in the practice of selective logging and protection of the core forest zone (ecology). Conversely, the health of the *rimbo* ecosystem, characterized by abundant springs and fertile soil, is seen as a reflection of the harmony of social and spiritual relations of the community (feedback from ecology to socio-spiritual).

This integrative model makes an essential

contribution to the global ecotheological discourse. So far, ecotheological discourse has often been dominated by the perspectives of the world's major religions in textual and doctrinal forms. The case study of *Rimbo* shows how theology can be "grounded" and intertwined with pre-existing local ecological wisdom. It presents a concrete example of "vernacular environmental ethics"—ethics that are not born from abstract philosophical reflections in an ivory tower, but rather grow from the daily life experiences of a community in its interaction with a particular biophysical landscape. The synthesis between Minangkabau customs and Islam in managing *rimbo* shows that dialogue between religious traditions, religion, and local wisdom can produce rich and applicable environmental ethics.

Furthermore, the concept of *rimbo* offers an alternative paradigm to the current dominant sustainability model. Suppose conventional sustainability models are often trapped in a "three pillars" approach (economic, social, environmental) that still tends to be separate. In that case, the *rimbo model* shows a more holistic integration in which the spiritual/cultural pillar is the foundation. In this model, sustainability is not just a technical goal to be achieved, but a way of life, an expression of the proper cosmic order. The successful preservation of *rimbo ulayat* in several *nagari* in Minangkabau, which is often more effective than state-managed national parks, proves the validity of this local cosmology-based approach. It underlines that effective conservation cannot be separated from recognizing indigenous peoples' rights and respecting their knowledge systems. *Jungle* is relevant to the Minangkabau people and is a valuable lesson for the world in its efforts to find a path towards a more just and ecologically sustainable future.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Minangkabau concept of *rimbo* functions as an ontological bridge integrating spirituality and ecology. It is not merely a physical forest but a sacred cosmological entity managed through a collective ethic derived from synthesizing customary law (*adat*) and Islamic principles (*syarak*). Theoretically, this research contributes a grounded model of vernacular ecotheology to the global discourse. It enriches Malay-Islamic studies by empirically demonstrating how local cosmology and religious doctrine can create a robust framework for sustainability. Practically, the *rimbo* model offers a valuable blueprint for developing conservation policies that are both culturally resonant and effective by formally recognizing and integrating customary and faith-based management systems.

This study has limitations. Its focus on the Minangkabau context means the findings may not be directly generalizable to other cultures. Furthermore, while providing rich, in-depth data, the qualitative methodology does not allow for statistical analysis of conservation outcomes. Therefore, future research should

undertake comparative studies with Malay communities in Malaysia and Brunei to explore variations of this ecological-spiritual paradigm. Quantitative research assessing the ecological effectiveness of traditionally managed *rimbo* areas compared to state-managed forests is also recommended to validate these findings further.

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