



A Phenomenological Insight into Institutional and Value Shifts Among Minangkabau Women: Implications for Understanding Muslim Minority Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the shifting role of women in Minangkabau society, the world's largest matrilineal Muslim community, where contemporary dynamics challenge traditional institutional structures and value systems. This research analyzes how social mobility, migration, and institutional changes affect Minangkabau women's position as Bundo Kanduang, situating findings within comparative perspectives on matrilineal Muslim communities in majority and minority contexts. The research employed a phenomenological approach involving observation, in-depth interviews with 40 informants across five West Sumatra districts (Tanah Datar, Agam, Lima Puluh Kota, Padang Pariaman, Solok), and document analysis. Data interpretation centered on women's lived experiences to understand institutional and value transformation dynamics. Results reveal women's roles shifted from collective matrilineal responsibilities to nuclear family focus, driven by external factors (globalization, education, inter-ethnic marriage) and internal factors (value reinterpretation, institutional desacralization). Traditional institutions like Rumah Gadang and Bundo Kanduang organizations experienced functional decline. Comparative analysis demonstrates that Minangkabau women in majority Muslim contexts navigate internally-driven changes with substantial adaptive space for syncretic shariah-adat negotiation, while matrilineal Muslim minorities face intense external pressures from dominant patrilineal legal frameworks, resulting in accelerated institutional transformation with constrained individual agency. Role transformation results from complex global-local interactions, with adaptation mechanisms differing systematically between majority and minority contexts. These findings illuminate Islamic family law's differential flexibility across socio-political settings and provide crucial insights for developing culturally sensitive policies supporting matrilineal Muslim communities navigating modernization pressures globally.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Minangkabau community is the only ethnic group in Indonesia that preserves a matrilineal kinship system and is widely acknowledged as “*the largest matrilineal society in the world*” (Fadoli, 2020). Within this system, women traditionally occupy a central and honored position because they are viewed as the bearers of lineage, custodians of family property, and the primary source of cultural wisdom (Dewi, 2024). This cultural orientation is reflected in classical Minangkabau texts (*Tambo*) that describe women as “*limpapeh rumah nan gadang*”, symbolizing dignity, moral authority, and stability within the extended family structure (Adolph, 2021). The reverence accorded to women is also aligned with broader philosophical expressions such as “*alam takambah jadi guru*”, which teach values of respect, especially toward mothers and *bundo kanduang* (Hendra & Hadiati, 2025). Furthermore, Islamic values reinforce this cultural ethos through the principle of honoring mothers above all. Historically, these interwoven cultural and religious values made women central figures in domestic, economic, and lineage-related domains, positioning them as key custodians of Minangkabau cultural continuity.

The study of matrilineal transformation in Minangkabau society holds significance beyond its immediate geographical and cultural context. While Minangkabau represents a majority Muslim setting in West Sumatra, Indonesia, the dynamics observed here offer critical insights for understanding similar processes in Muslim minority communities worldwide. The adaptive mechanisms, institutional challenges, and value negotiations documented in this research provide a comparative framework for analyzing how matrilineal Muslim societies navigate modernity under different socio-political conditions, whether as cultural majorities with substantial autonomy or as minorities facing external pressures from dominant patrilineal systems.

Comparative research on matrilineal Muslim societies reveals both universal patterns of modernization-induced change and context-specific adaptation mechanisms that differ between majority and minority settings. Studies of Minangkabau diaspora communities in Malaysia demonstrate processes of cultural adaptation and institutional transformation under minority conditions (Blackwood, 2007), while research on the Khasi people of Northeast India—including the Muslim Khasi minority—documents similar patterns of matrilineal erosion under state legal pressures and majority cultural influence (Nongbri, 1988, 2000). Comparative studies of other matrilineal groups such as the Mosuo in China reveal parallel trajectories of institutional weakening and declining women's authority amid modernization and market integration (Mattison, 2011; Walsh, 2005). However, these studies also reveal that the speed, intensity, and primary drivers of change vary systematically based on whether communities operate within majority or minority contexts (Shih, 2009). In majority Muslim settings, transformation tends to be internally driven through education, migration, and value reinterpretation (Kato, 1982). In minority contexts, external cultural pressures, state legal systems, and assimilation dynamics often accelerate and intensify institutional changes (Nongbri, 2000).

This comparative dimension is particularly relevant for understanding Islamic law adaptation processes. In Minangkabau, the negotiation occurs primarily between Islamic jurisprudence (*shariah*) and customary law (*adat*), with both systems enjoying religious and cultural legitimacy. In Muslim minority contexts, however, Islamic family law must additionally navigate dominant state legal frameworks that often assume patrilineal inheritance patterns and nuclear family structures. This “triple negotiation”—between *shariah*, custom, and state law—creates unique pressures and

adaptation strategies that illuminate the flexibility and constraints of Islamic legal traditions across diverse settings (Peletz, 2011).

However, contemporary Minangkabau society is experiencing significant socio-cultural transformations that challenge these long-held norms. Several scholars point to shifts in matrilineal practices, weakening customary authority, and the declining influence of *Bundo Kanduang* (Lestari et al., 2023). Factors such as increasing educational attainment, migration patterns, inter-ethnic marriages, and modernization have reconfigured gender relations and reshaped institutional structures. As a result, the traditional centrality of women is increasingly questioned, and their roles in various customary and domestic spheres appear to have diminished. These transformations mirror patterns observed in other matrilineal Muslim communities globally, suggesting that Minangkabau's experience represents a specific instance of broader socio-cultural processes affecting traditional kinship systems in the modern era.

Several studies have examined aspects of Minangkabau matrilineality, including the cultural symbolism of *Bundo Kanduang*, changing inheritance practices, and the socio-economic role of women (Yunarti, 2017). Adolph (2021) explores the cultural significance of women in Minangkabau heritage, while (Dewi, 2024). analyze the symbolic wisdom embedded in matrilineal philosophy. Other works (e.g., Lestari et al., 2023) highlight the socio-cultural pressures leading to the weakening of matrilineal institutions. Studies on migration and modernity both within Indonesia and in global matrilineal contexts also show similar patterns of shifting gender dynamics, suggesting that mobility often brings competing value systems that disrupt traditional kinship structures.

Beyond the Minangkabau-specific literature, comparative studies of matrilineal Muslim communities provide essential theoretical context for this research. Studies of Minangkabau migration patterns and diaspora communities demonstrate how distance from traditional homelands accelerates institutional transformation (Kato, 1982). Research on Minangkabau-descended communities in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia—where matrilineal practices (*adat perpatih*) historically mirrored West Sumatran customs—shows that urbanization and integration into multiethnic Malaysian society have produced significant shifts in residence patterns (Peletz, 2011; Stivens, 2023). Subsequent generations increasingly adopt nuclear family arrangements rather than maintaining matrilocal residence, reflecting adaptation to dominant Malay cultural norms and urban economic structures (Kreager & Schröder-Butterfill, 2008; Samsudin & Idid, 2016; Seo et al., 2022). This transformation is further reinforced by Malaysian legal frameworks that, while recognizing customary law in limited contexts, generally favor patrilineal inheritance patterns (Bin, 2012). These patterns suggest that minority status and integration pressures within multiethnic environments intensify changes to traditional matrilineal practices (Oosterhoff et al., 2011; Sebastian, 2022).

Similarly, research on the Khasi people of Meghalaya, Northeast India, reveals complex patterns of matrilineal transformation under multiple pressures. The Khasi maintain matrilineal practices while comprising diverse religious communities including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. Scholars document that Khasi communities, including Muslim Khasis, experience compounded challenges as practitioners of matrilineal customs within a broader Indian legal framework that presumes patrilineal inheritance. The introduction of state legislation, particularly the Meghalaya

Succession to Self-Acquired Property Act of 1984, introduced patrilineal elements into inheritance law, creating tensions with traditional matrilineal practices (Nongbri, 1988, 2000). Khasi women experience erosion of traditional authority through state legal pressures that increasingly favor nuclear family structures and individual property rights over collective matrilineal holdings (Roy, 2018). This combination of legal modernization and cultural pressures creates adaptation mechanisms distinct from those observed in majority Muslim contexts, where communities retain greater autonomy over customary practices.

Comparative matrilineal studies beyond Muslim communities also offer relevant insights. Research on the Mosuo of Southwest China demonstrates how market integration and state policies systematically undermine women's traditional control over land and household decision-making, even in the absence of religious factors (Li, 2020; Mattison et al., 2022; Qian & Wei, 2023). The introduction of formal property registration systems and state-mandated household structures has shifted authority from traditional matrilineal arrangements toward patterns that favor male household heads (Chapoto et al., 2011; Khalid et al., 2015; Lanzinger, 2012). Cross-cultural comparative research on matrilineal societies documents similar trajectories globally: modernization, formal legal systems, and market integration consistently challenge women's traditional authority, though the specific mechanisms vary by cultural and political context (Lestarini et al., 2021). Studies examining African matrilineal societies, including the Akan of Ghana and the matrilineal groups of Malawi and Zambia, reveal that formal legal systems and economic modernization gradually shift practical authority from matrilineal elders to male family members, despite continued symbolic adherence to matrilineal ideology (Chome & McCall, 2005; Parpart, 2019). These cross-cultural patterns suggest that matrilineal systems face common vulnerabilities to modernization pressures, though the specific mechanisms and responses vary by context.

From an Islamic legal perspective, scholars have examined how Muslim communities negotiate between religious law, customary practices, and state legal systems. Agha et al. (2024), Hermawan et al. (2025) and Mustapha et al. (2024) extensive research on Islamic courts and cultural politics in Malaysia and Southeast Asia demonstrates that Islamic family law exhibits considerable flexibility in adapting to local contexts, but this adaptability operates differently in majority versus minority settings. His work shows that in majority Muslim contexts like Malaysia and Indonesia, communities exercise greater autonomy in determining how shariah and adat interact, often developing syncretic legal practices that accommodate both systems (Samsul Hady et al., 2025). In these settings, Islamic courts and customary institutions can negotiate complementary roles, with communities drawing on both legal traditions as circumstances require (Nordin et al., 2025). In minority contexts, however, external legal frameworks constrain this negotiation, often forcing communities to choose between religious principles, customary practices, and legal compliance with dominant state law (Huyen, 2025). This creates what can be termed a "layered negotiation" wherein Muslim minorities must balance religious identity, cultural tradition, and legal conformity simultaneously (Richardson & Rammal, 2018).

Feminist anthropological theory provides additional analytical tools for understanding the gap between cultural discourse and everyday gender practice. Scholars examining matrilineal societies emphasize that idealized norms of women's authority often persist in cultural rhetoric and symbolic representations even as practical power shifts to male relatives, state institutions, or market forces (Blackwood, 2007). This theoretical framework, which distinguishes between

symbolic status and actual authority, helps explain how women can simultaneously be revered in cultural discourse while experiencing declining practical influence in family and community decisions (Stivens, 2023). Blackwood's (2007) ethnographic research in a Minangkabau village demonstrates this dynamic clearly through her analysis of how women negotiate power in everyday practices. While women maintain symbolic centrality in cultural discourse—reflected in traditional imagery such as the "limpapeh rumah gadang" (main pillar of the great house)—their practical authority in economic and political decisions has diminished with modernization and state intervention (Blackwood, 2007; Kato, 1982). This theoretical framework, which distinguishes between symbolic status and actual authority, helps explain how women can simultaneously be revered in cultural discourse while experiencing declining practical influence in family and community decisions (Stivens, 2023). Recent feminist analyses further demonstrate that this disconnect between cultural symbolism and lived reality represents a common feature of matrilineal adaptation to modernity across diverse geographical and cultural contexts (Anggraeni, 2023; Irwan et al., 2022).

Despite the existing literature, several gaps remain. First, previous studies tend to analyze Minangkabau women's changing roles either symbolically or descriptively, without integrating these observations into a broader analytical framework that links mobility, marriage patterns, and institutional change. Second, although scholars acknowledge the weakening of *Bundo Kanduang*, few studies systematically trace *why* this weakening occurs by connecting socio-cultural processes with changes in value systems and customary authority. Third, there is limited research that explicitly interrogates how matrilineal commitments are being renegotiated in everyday practice—especially concerning domestic, political, and inheritance-related roles.

Fourth, and most significantly for this study, there is insufficient comparative analysis examining how similar matrilineal transformations unfold differently in Muslim majority versus minority contexts, and what these differences reveal about Islamic law adaptation mechanisms under varying socio-political conditions. While individual case studies exist for various matrilineal Muslim communities, systematic comparison of adaptation patterns, driving forces, and outcomes across majority-minority contexts remains underexplored. This gap limits our understanding of whether observed changes in Minangkabau society represent unique local dynamics or instantiate broader patterns that transcend specific geographical and political settings.

Fifth, existing literature rarely employs phenomenological approaches that center women's lived experiences and subjective interpretations of their changing roles. Most studies focus on institutional changes, legal transformations, or economic factors without deeply engaging with how women themselves understand, experience, and navigate the tensions between traditional expectations and contemporary realities. A phenomenological approach offers unique insights by revealing the meanings women attach to their roles, the emotional and psychological dimensions of negotiating change, and the creative interpretive strategies they employ to reconcile competing demands.

Thus, the mechanisms driving the transformation of women's roles remain underexplored, leaving a conceptual and empirical gap that this paper aims to address.

This research aims to (1) Analyze the shifting roles and responsibilities of Minangkabau women, particularly as Bundo Kanduang, in response to contemporary social changes including education, migration, inter-ethnic marriage, and urbanization; (2) Examine how social mobility, migration, education, and inter-ethnic marriages affect matrilineal institutional structures, specifically focusing on the changing functions of Rumah Gadang (traditional great houses) and Bundo Kanduang organizations; (3) Investigate the interaction between Islamic values and customary norms (adat) in shaping women's contemporary positions, exploring how religious principles and traditional practices mutually reinforce or create tensions in modern contexts; (4) Situate these findings within comparative perspectives on matrilineal Muslim communities in both majority and minority contexts to identify universal patterns and context-specific mechanisms of institutional transformation and value adaptation; (5) Draw implications for understanding Islamic family law adaptation processes across diverse socio-cultural settings, particularly regarding how shariah principles negotiate with local customs under different political and demographic conditions; (6) Employ a phenomenological approach to center women's lived experiences, subjective interpretations, and meaning-making processes as they navigate tensions between traditional expectations as Bundo Kanduang and contemporary socio-economic realities.

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes to three interconnected scholarly conversations. First, it advances understanding of gender dynamics and institutional change in matrilineal societies by providing rich phenomenological data on women's experiences. Second, it contributes to comparative studies of Islamic family law adaptation by examining how majority-minority status affects negotiation processes between shariah, custom, and state law. Third, it offers practical insights for cultural revitalization efforts and policy development supporting matrilineal communities navigating modernization pressures while maintaining valued cultural and religious identities.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic knowledge production. As matrilineal Muslim communities worldwide face similar pressures—whether Minangkabau diaspora in Southeast Asian cities, Khasi Muslims in South Asia, or other groups navigating the intersection of religious identity, customary practice, and modern legal systems—understanding adaptation mechanisms and their outcomes becomes increasingly urgent. This study's comparative framework enables insights that transcend the Minangkabau case, offering analytical tools and empirical patterns applicable to diverse matrilineal Muslim contexts.

2. METHODS

Given the central importance of methodology in this study, the research was designed using a systematic framework of inquiry to address the key problems and to facilitate the processes of data collection, organization, and analysis. This approach ensures that the research is conducted objectively, scientifically, and yields optimal results (Amirudin & Asikin, 2016).

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, which examines natural settings with the researcher functioning as the primary instrument. The phenomenological orientation is particularly appropriate for investigating the shifting roles of Minangkabau women because it centers on lived experiences, subjective interpretations, and the meanings women themselves attach to their changing positions within matrilineal structures (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Rather than merely documenting institutional transformations, this approach reveals how women experience, understand, and navigate the tensions between traditional expectations as Bundo

Kanduang and contemporary socio-economic realities. Data collection was carried out using multiple techniques, the data analysis followed an inductive process, and the findings emphasize meaning rather than generalization. In accordance with the characteristics of phenomenological inquiry, this research does not rely on statistical testing but instead focuses on in-depth understanding, contextual interpretation, and the exploration of lived experiences.

The research adopts a case study method, which involves an in-depth examination of individuals, groups, institutions, and specific communities to understand their background, conditions, contributing factors, and internal interactions. In terms of its nature, this study is descriptive-analytical, aiming to systematically, factually, and accurately describe phenomena while analyzing the relationships between various elements, including possible causal connections. The research is expected to reveal general tendencies that contribute to scientific understanding of the phenomenon being investigated while also situating these findings within comparative perspectives on matrilineal Muslim communities in both majority and minority contexts.

Aligned with the type of data required, this study relies on primary data sources, obtained directly from informants through interviews, observations, and official documents. The focus of this research—*A Phenomenological Insight into Institutional and Value Shifts Among Minangkabau Women*—necessitates the collection of firsthand information. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who possess relevant experiences, knowledge, and direct involvement in institutional and value transformations within Minangkabau society.

This research was conducted in five districts in West Sumatra, selected to represent the geographical and cultural diversity of the Minangkabau region. The five regions were chosen based on the traditional division of Minangkabau territory, which consists of *darek* (highland core areas), *rantau* (migration areas), and coastal zones. The *darek* region covers Luhak nan Tigo (the three original territories): Luhak Tanah Datar in Tanah Datar Regency, Luhak Agam in Agam Regency, and Luhak Lima Puluh Kota in Lima Puluh Kota Regency. The coastal area is represented by Padang Pariaman Regency, and the *rantau* area is represented by Solok Regency. This geographical distribution ensures that the study captures variations in how matrilineal practices are maintained, adapted, or transformed across different ecological and social contexts within the broader Minangkabau cultural area.

The study involves 40 informants strategically distributed across the five districts. The inclusion of key informants—such as Bundo Kanduang administrators, LKAAM (Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau) and KAN (Kerapatan Adat Nagari) officials, academics, and local women—aligns with the study's phenomenological aim to explore shifts in women's roles from multiple perspectives. The selection of 40 informants was deemed sufficient based on the principle of information power in phenomenological research, where the richness and relevance of participants' experiences matter more than sample size (Wilson, 2015). The informants were purposively selected to represent stakeholders who directly engage with, shape, or experience transformations in gender roles within Minangkabau communities. The sampling strategy ensured diversity across age, social status, educational background, occupation, and institutional roles, capturing variations that reflect the complexity of contemporary Minangkabau social dynamics. This methodological choice strengthens the credibility and transferability of the study's findings.

by ensuring that multiple voices and perspectives contribute to understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Data collection combined three primary techniques: (1) Observation focusing on daily activities, customary events, and traditional practices in the selected research areas, allowing the researcher to witness how matrilineal norms are enacted or contested in everyday life; (2) In-depth interviews with the 40 informants, using semi-structured protocols that allowed participants to articulate their experiences, interpretations, and perspectives on changing women's roles; and (3) Document study examining official records, customary texts (tambo), organizational documents, and relevant archival materials to contextualize participants' narratives within broader institutional and historical frameworks.

Table 1 presents the distribution of 40 informants across five districts in West Sumatra, selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives on matrilineal transformation. The informants comprise six categories: LKAAM officials (n=5) representing provincial-level customary institutions, KAN members (n=11) from village-level customary governance, religious leaders (n=5) who mediate between Islamic values and adat, Bundo Kanduang administrators and members (n=15) whose experiences directly illuminate women's changing roles, academics (n=2) providing scholarly insights, and housewives (n=5) representing ordinary women navigating traditional and modern expectations. Tanah Datar has the highest number of informants (n=10) due to its status as the cultural heartland of Minangkabau civilization, while the remaining districts contribute 6-8 informants each, ensuring geographical and contextual diversity that strengthens the study's phenomenological depth and comparative insights.

Table 1. Distribution of Informants

No	Informant	District					Total
		Tanah	Agam	50	Padang	Solok	
		Datar		Koto	Pariaman		
1	LKAAM	1	1	1	1	1	5
2	KAM	2	2	2	2	1	11
3	Tokoh Agama	1	1	1	1	1	5
4	Bundokandung	3	3	3	3	2	15
5	Akademisi	2	-	-	-	-	2
6	IRT	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total		10	8	8	8	6	40

Source: Processed by Researcher, 2024.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1992) interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. However, to strengthen methodological rigor and align with phenomenological principles, this research also applied triangulation across multiple data sources. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from field observations with participants' narratives during interviews, and validating these findings with written documents. This cross-verification process was carried out systematically to enhance the credibility, dependability, and overall validity of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). The phenomenological analysis specifically attended to how participants constructed meaning around their experiences, identifying common themes, divergent perspectives, and the ways women navigate tensions between tradition and modernity. This analytical approach enables the study to

move beyond descriptive accounts toward interpretive insights that reveal the deeper meanings and mechanisms underlying institutional and value shifts among Minangkabau women.

This methodological design not only illuminates the Minangkabau case in depth but also generates analytical frameworks transferable to understanding similar dynamics in Muslim minority contexts. The comparative insights embedded in data collection and analysis enable this study to contribute to broader scholarly discussions on how matrilineal Muslim communities—whether in majority or minority settings—adapt Islamic family law and customary practices amid modernization pressures. By documenting both the universal patterns and context-specific mechanisms of adaptation, this research offers empirical foundations for understanding Islamic law flexibility and constraints across diverse socio-political conditions (Peletz, 2011; Stivens, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Changing Role of Women

As shown in Table 1, of the 40 informants selected, 26 stated that noticeable changes have occurred in matrilineal practices particularly in their respective regions while 14 informants noted that the tradition continues to survive. However, these figures function only as an initial overview of the distribution of responses. In phenomenological research, numerical counts alone are insufficient to capture the depth of participants' lived experiences.

To address this, the manuscript has been revised to provide richer qualitative descriptions that illustrate *how* and *why* these changes are perceived by the informants. The analysis integrates direct narratives and thematic insights derived from interviews, demonstrating the nuances behind both the perceived shifts and the persistence of matrilineal values. Thus, Figure 1 is presented merely as a visual summary, while the substantive interpretation relies on experiential accounts and contextual explanations that reflect the complexities of Minangkabau women's realities.

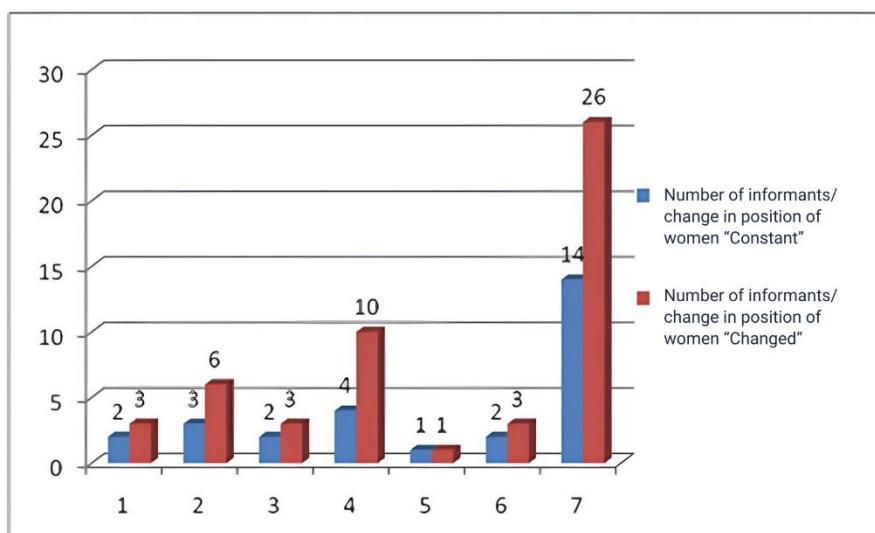


Figure 1. Statement of the Number of Informants on the Shifting Role of Women

Source: Processed from Field Data, 2024

Shows the distribution of informant responses regarding the shifting role of women in Minangkabau society, where 26 of the 40 informants stated that substantial changes have occurred, while 14 informants reported that the matrilineal tradition continues to be maintained. Rather than functioning merely as numerical representation, the figure illustrates the general perception that the traditional role of women particularly as *Bundo Kanduangis* increasingly challenged in contemporary Minangkabau life.

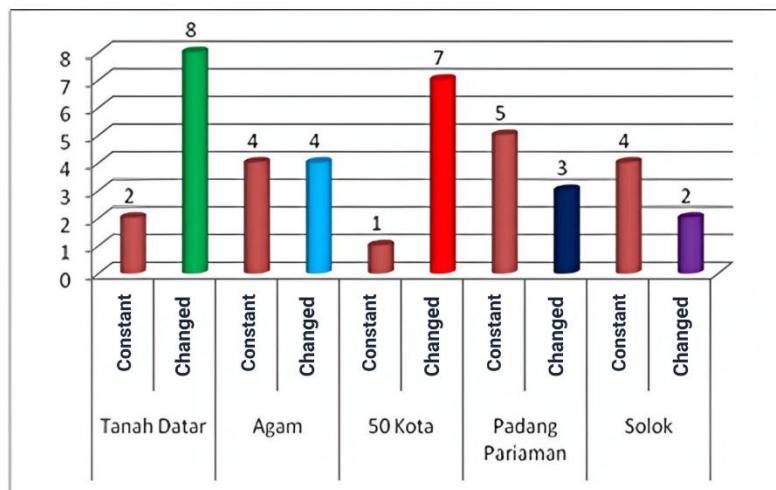


Figure 2. Portrait of Informants' Opinions on the Shifting Role of Women in each district

Source: Processed from Field Data, 2024

Figures 1 and 2 are not only descriptive but also central to understanding the shifting role of women in Minangkabau society. Figure 1 shows that a majority of informants (26 out of 40) perceive significant changes in women's roles, suggesting that the traditional position of *Bundo Kanduang* is increasingly questioned within contemporary social dynamics. Figure 2 further clarifies this pattern by showing that Tanah Datar and Lima Puluh Kota report the highest perceptions of change, which may be associated with stronger migration flows, greater access to higher education, and more intensive interaction with urban cultural norms. These contextual factors help explain why certain districts experience a more accelerated transformation of women's roles compared to others. Together, both figures reinforce the argument that shifts in matrilineal practices are uneven and shaped by district-specific socio-economic conditions, an issue that will be examined more deeply in the subsequent analysis.

Women's Responsibility

The interview data show that women's responsibilities in Minangkabau society have undergone notable changes, particularly in how the traditional role of *Bundo Kanduang* is experienced and interpreted today. Informants consistently describe a shift from the collective responsibilities of caring for the extended matrilineal family to a narrower focus on the nuclear household.

One informant used the metaphor of the Limpapeh Rumah Nan Gadang, the central pillar of the *rumah gadang*, to illustrate the traditional expectation:

“Bundo Kanduang is like the main pillar of the gadang house. If the pillar is sturdy, the house is safe; if it weakens, the house collapses. But now, women as Bundo Kanduang only take care of their small households and no longer look after the wider family because they are busy with their own duties.” (Interview, Bundo RS [60], July 19, 2024, Kamang Magek)

This description contrasts with cultural representations of Minangkabau women in kaba and tambo, which consistently portray them as wise leaders who safeguard family values and lineage property. As another informant explained:

“The word Bundo Kanduang means a true mother a wise leader as shown in our legends. But the higher a woman’s education, the busier she becomes with her own responsibilities.” (Interview, Dt. Ad [50], August 16, 2024, Pariangan)

Another informant distinguished the experiences of women who remain in the village and continue to follow traditional norms—*manurui alua jo patuik* (acting according to custom) and *mamalibaro harta pusako* (preserving inheritance) from those who migrate:

“Women who stay in the village still protect their children and family members. But it is different for women who migrate.” (Interview, Bundo SY [65], August 16, 2024, Pariangan)

Phenomenological Interpretation

These accounts reveal that Minangkabau women experience their responsibilities as a dynamic negotiation between tradition and contemporary demands. The symbolic identity of *Bundo Kanduang* once tied to moral authority and collective responsibility is being reinterpreted in light of increased educational attainment, employment, and migration.

The lived experience shared by the informants shows a sense of *tension* between adhering to ancestral expectations and responding to modern socio-economic realities. Rather than a simple decline of traditional roles, these narratives illustrate a redefinition of womanhood in Minangkabau society, where cultural identity is continuously shaped by personal circumstances, mobility, and shifting family structures.

These patterns of responsibility transformation, while specific to Minangkabau, reflect broader dynamics observed in matrilineal Muslim communities navigating modernization. The negotiation between collective and nuclear family obligations documented here offers insights applicable to understanding similar processes in Muslim minority contexts where external pressures may intensify these tensions.

Discrimination and Social Stat

The interview data show that Minangkabau women are experiencing a gradual erosion of their symbolic and practical authority as *Bundo Kanduang*. As LS (60) stated, “Minangkabau women now never get their full status as *bundo kanduang*... we have lived in the house built by our husbands and are busy as housewives only.” This reflects a shift from the traditional *matrilocality* residence pattern toward nuclear or patrilineal household arrangements. Recent studies on social change in Southeast Asian kinship systems confirm that urbanization, economic pressures, and new housing patterns contribute significantly to the weakening of extended-family authority (Setiawan & Idrus, 2020)

From a gender-role theoretical perspective, the decreasing authority of *Bundo Kanduang* aligns with recent findings from other matrilineal societies. Research on the Khasi in India (Nongbri, 2000; Roy, 2018), the Akan in Ghana (Agyeman & Owusu, 2022) and the Mosuo in China (Zhang & Ji, 2020) shows parallel trends: women retain symbolic status but lose practical influence in land control and household decisions due to state regulations, market expansion, and the normalization of nuclear-family structures. Thus, the Minangkabau case fits within these broader international patterns.

The weakening of women's authority also affects their educational role in the lineage. BJ (54) explained, "Being clever and eloquent in speech determines the effectiveness in educating the children," emphasizing the centrality of women in intergenerational value transmission. However, reduced involvement in communal life and increased domestic burdens limit this traditional pedagogic function. AS (45) further noted, "Lack of attention to children... results in women who are damaged by their dignity." Recent sociological research supports this concern: studies in Indonesia and Mexico show that modern work pressures reduce mothers' capacity to transmit customary norms and values (Ramos-Olazagasti et al., 2014; Setyonaluri & Utomo, 2024).

Land management an essential domain of matrilineal authority is also undergoing transformation. ER (50) described how "mamak has mortgaged a lot of *pusako* land... the land is certified so that it can be mortgaged to the Bank." Contemporary anthropological studies likewise highlight that the commodification and formal registration of customary land often shift decision-making power from women to male relatives or state institutions (Fonjong, 2016; Linkow, 2019; Ramos-Olazagasti et al., 2014). These processes have been observed across Southeast Asia and the Pacific, indicating a broader weakening of matrilineal land rights.

Yet, the cultural ideal remains compelling. As GN (60) affirmed, "Minangkabau women contain power and a very high position in the family, the whole system of matrilineal social life belongs to her." The contrast between idealized norms and lived realities reflects what feminist anthropologists term the gap between cultural discourse and everyday gender practice. Recent feminist anthropology literature Beban & Bourke Martignoni (2024), Dutta (2022) and Huang et al. (2025) emphasizes that this gap is widening in many matrilineal societies undergoing rapid modernization. The Minangkabau case therefore exemplifies a global pattern in which economic restructuring and changing kinship arrangements reshape women's traditional roles.

Tambo

The Tambo or Minangkabau traditional documents also contain proverbs that show the central role of Minangkabau women. This can be seen in the following proverbs.

First, this is reflected in a traditional proverb: "*Umbun puruik key grip, umbun puruik aluang bunian*" which means that the economic result as a key grip is *Bundo Kanduang* (women). Rangkiang which serves to store the results of the rice fields is located in the courtyard of the Rumah Gadang occupied by *Bundo Kanduang*.

Second, Minangkabau culture states; *Adopun nan disabuik parampuan, butakai taratik politely, mamakai baso jo basi, tabu diereang jo gendeang*. (Interview, Bundo YS, Kubung)The meaning is, of course, the character of women who will lower the matrilineal line has the main characteristics that are able to use order and manners in social settings, make small talk, recognize conditions and understand their position.

Third, Petatah Minangkabau which reads

Rumah basandi batu

Adat basandi Alue Patuik

Mamakai Anggo jo Tanggo

Sarato raso jo Pareso

Meaning:

The house is based on stone,

Adat is based on the right and proper way

Wear rules that must be obeyed

As well as ethics and accuracy

Fourth, "Yang buto mahambuih lasuang, yang pakak malapeh badie, yang lumpuah panghuni rumah, yang kuek mambawo baban, yang kayo tampaek batenggang, yang andie disuruah-suruah, yang cadiak lawan barundiang"

The shifting role of women (Bundo Kanduang) shows a challenge to the sustainability of the matrilineal system in Minangkabau society in this modern era. The characteristic of Minangkabau society as the 'guardian' of the matrilineal system is in a dilemma. On the one hand, there are large currents from outside that try to change the system in society (Idris, 2011). This current is confronted with the desire to maintain customs despite the challenges on the other side. The proverbs enshrined in the Tambo, especially regarding the division of tasks, no longer work well. The Tambo states:

"Yang buto mahambuih lasuang, yang pakak malapeh badie, yang lumpuah panghuni rumah, yang kuek mambawo baban, yang kayo tampaek batenggang, yang andie disuruah-suruah, yang cadiak lawan barundiang."

The blind blows mortar, the deaf discharges the gun, the lame waits for the house, the strong lightens the burden, the rich shares, the ignorant can be ordered, the clever opponent deliberates so that the overall meaning is that each human being has its own function according to his physical and mental state.

The challenges faced not only come from external factors such as the demands of the times due to globalization, but also internal factors triggered by the advancement of education, the occurrence of migration, marriage, and the increasingly varied professions that are engaged in, as well as the low desire of the Minangkabau people themselves to be part of *adat*. These factors have led to more radical changes as they have been followed by a widespread erosion of *adat's* influence in people's lives.

Education and Migration Factors

Education is a factor that influences the shifting role of women in Minangkabau society. Because, after a woman gets a higher education, the tendency to settle outside the area is very strong (Irwan et al., 2022). This is related to open career opportunities, wider job opportunities, and away from complex customary rules and increasingly preoccupied by activities that are not directly related to their role in Minangkabau society. This phenomenon was confirmed by Dt. Ad, an informant from Pariangan, who said that.

“... see how Minang women are found in legends that are full of messages, such as Kaba Sabai Nan Alui, Cindua Mato, Bundo Kanduang, When translated, the word Bundo Kanduang can be interpreted, among others, bundo means mother, while kanduang means biological or real. In Minangkabau lore and Tambo, which are categorized into myths, Bundo Kanduang is symbolized as a wise and prudent leader. “That is why this is influenced by the education of the woman herself, the higher the school, the busier she is with her duties” (Interview, Dt. Ad, 50, Pariangan, August 16, 2024).

Due to higher education, a woman no longer even has time as a mother to educate her children because she is increasingly busy. This busyness has an impact on the process of inheriting values to children. Children are no longer educated optimally so that many of their children actually fall into negative things. This was also recognized by RS, an informant from Kubung. In his confession he said:

“Inattention to children is lacking, especially to girls, so women are damaged and their dignity will be damaged as the saying goes; *If the karuah aia is upstream, karuaaaah juo until kamuaro, if the induak kuriak, rintiak anaknya, tuturan aia atok jatuh ka palambahan juo*” (Interview, AS, Member of Bundokanduang, 45, Kubung).

The informant's statement above provides an explanation for the shift in the main role of women (who will hold the function and status as Bundo Kanduang) which has an impact on the preparation of future matrilineal generations. In fact, with a good (higher) education, a woman should be more “articulate” so that she can play her main function as an educator in the community. Alluding to this shifting role ideal, BJ emphasized that.

“Articulate, this trait is important for a Bundo Kanduang in connection with her function as an educator both in the family environment and in the community in Korong (hamlet, pen.) and kampung. *Being* clever and eloquent in speech determines the effectiveness in educating the children. An educator who is good at speaking, then what he will convey will be absorbed easily by the person he is educating” (Interview, BJ [54], KAN Nagarai Koto Baru Simalanggang).

Higher education ideally strengthens customary institutions so that the role of women is also stronger, but in practice in Minangkabau society today the opposite is true. The role of women is very limited, even very far from 'nature' as the guardian of the matrilineal society system. This is because it is women who are the way of inheriting matrilineal itself. This is as stated in the Tambo by Bundo YS in Kubung that:

“*Adopun nan disabuik parampuan, tapakai taratik dengan sopan, mamakai baso jo basi, tabu diereang jo gendeang.*

Meaning: The meaning is, surely the character of the woman who will lower the matrilineal line has the main characteristics that are able to use order and manners in social settings, make small talk, recognize conditions and understand her position (Interview, Bundo YS [65] on August 16, 2024 in Pariangan).

This assertion emphasizes that the education factor for women should be returned to its original position, namely as educators of children in the Gadang house and preparing the next generation and regeneration of the Bundo kanduang in Minangkabau society.

Intertribal Marriage

In addition to the education factor that influences the shifting role of Bundo kanduang, the marriage factor of Minangkabau women both with men from the same tribe and with men from other tribes also influences this role shift. After a woman is married, she no longer lives and occupies her house. She moves and follows her husband so that her role is also more controlled by her husband (male). Even after marriage, women no longer get their full status.

“Minangkabau women now never get their full status as bundo kanduang. Because the traditional *house* no longer exists, we have lived in the house built by our husbands and are busy as housewives only” (Interview, LS, housewife, July 19, 2024 in Kubang Putih).

This is LS's emphasis, which shows how marriage has affected the changing role of women in Minangkabau society so far. Marriage not only physically removes a woman from her home (Indriani et al., 2023), but also removes her from the bonds and customary rules that previously prevailed in her community as a matrilineal heir.

Domicile Factor

The role of women who still survive today is pinned to Minangkabau women who live in the villages (Ramadhini & Putra, 2025). When they still live in the village, various traditional activities can still be followed and maintained because they are still practiced by the community (Sawaludin et al., 2022). Likewise, the penetration of outside influences can still be minimized because they are still within the scope of extended families who also firmly maintain traditions or customs (Adolph, 2016), including still occupying Rumah Gadang. This is in line with what Bundo SY said that:

“*Manurui alua jo patuik, bajalan luruh bakato bana, Manampuah jalan nan pasa, indak bisa kuniang dek kunyik, lamak dek santan. Mamaliharo harto pusako, hemat, cermat, tidak boros, jan gadang pasak dari pado tiang, Mamaliharo anak-anak dalam keluarga dan kaumnya*”.

This is for women who live in their hometowns and do not think and want to change the customary order, let alone want to get out of the custom.always trying to be the usual protector of their children and family members who are still in the village, it is different for women who migrate” (Interview, Bundo SY [65], August 16, 2024 in Pariangan).

Another case for women who live in their hometown (Nagari/Jorong) who have never migrated and still live in a gadang house, she still carries out her function and role as a bundo kandung as it should be, because she still manages her people's rice fields and lives in the midst of her people. They have a relatively low level of education. Another opinion states that indigenous communities

who already live in urban areas are divided into two parts. Firstly, Minangkabau women are no longer visible in their role and function as Bundo Kanduang whose function is to protect their children and nieces, both in the fields of education and managing the family's assets, as well as determining the resolution of family matters and the continuity of descendants. This doesn't play a role at all because they rarely return home and some don't even know the genealogy of their people. Second; Women who live in cities still have relationships with their clan and know the ins and outs of their relationships. They also still carry out their role as Bundo kanduang both within their clan and in their capacity as administrators of the Bundo kanduang organization.

The education-migration-role shift nexus documented here illustrates how modernization creates internal pressures for change in majority Muslim contexts, contrasting with external assimilation pressures facing Muslim minorities. This distinction proves crucial for understanding differential adaptation mechanisms across socio-political settings.

Shifting Institutional Functions

Apart from cultural (soft) shifts, as described above, the existence of matrilineal traditional symbols also experienced the same thing (Sitika & Nirmala, 2017). The existence of Rumah Gadang so far also shows conditions that are relatively the same as the central role of women. Rumah Gadang itself is a representation of the role and existence of women in Minangkabau society (Anggraini & Asrita, 2022). The following data shows that the existence of Rumah Gadang is currently experiencing very fundamental changes, both in terms of the number (quantity) in each Nagari and its function. In terms of quantity, the existence of Rumah Gadang in West Sumatra based on research location can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Number of Gadang Houses in Five Regencies in West Sumatra

Regency	Subdistrict	Nagari	Rumah Gadang
Tanah Datar	14	75	150
Agam	16	82	166
Lima Puluh Kota	13	79	238
Padang Pariaman	17	103	178
Solok	14	74	214
Amount			946

Source: Field Data, Processed by Researchers, 2024

As for its function, each district experiences changes. Many Rumah Gadang in each area have changed their function and even no longer function. The existence of Rumah Gadang is not only a Minangkabau cultural identity, but also as a medium for preserving culture (Armawi & Mardiyah, 2024). Figure 3 shows that the function of the Rumah Gadang has undergone fundamental changes and is starting to be abandoned, as indicated by the increasing number of changes in it as expressed by the informants.

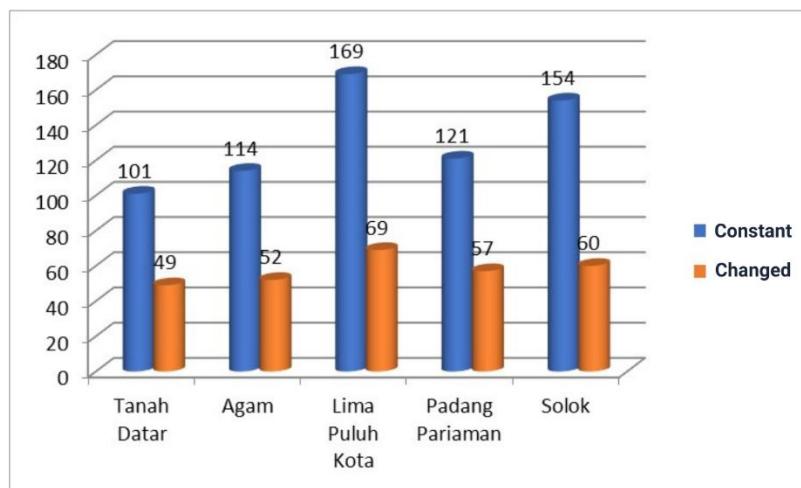


Figure 3. Portrait of changes in the function of Rumah Gadang in West Sumatra

Source: Field Data, Processed by Researchers, 2024.

In Figure 3 it is clearly seen that there have been quite significant changes to the function of Rumah Gadang. One of the reasons for this change was the indifference of the 'owner'. For example, Rumah Gadang was abandoned because it could no longer accommodate existing family members. As a result, the further erosion of Rumah Gadang's main function has an impact on the function of Bundokanduang itself, which no longer functions as a place to pass on (educational) traditional values to its children. In fact, currently many Rumah Gadang have had their function transferred because they have also changed ownership.

The explanation above confirms that the Rumah Gadang itself as a residence and gathering place for girls and women's families who will be fostered is no longer functioning as mandated by Minangkabau customs (Muhdaliha, 2022). Rumah Gadang as a place of residence and gathering place nowadays has many functions and is only used at certain times and events such as official visits. In fact, several Rumah Gadang have collapsed due to the old age of the buildings. What is even more worrying is that the Rumah Gadang was torn down and the land was distributed to half-sisters (breeds) to build a permanent house from the proceeds of the husband and wife's business. There are also those who change ownership because they are sold to someone else. As a result, women from the female side (mothers) moved and lived in houses that had been built by their parents or husband. Thus, the role of women who are elders as Bundo Kanduang is no longer visible because they only consist of their own small family who are also busy with their daily routines, both as farmers and as servants.

Education and Migration Factors

Comparative Perspectives: Minangkabau in Majority and Minority Contexts

The institutional and value shifts documented in this study illuminate broader patterns of matrilineal transformation that extend beyond the Minangkabau case. When situated within comparative frameworks, these findings reveal both universal pressures facing matrilineal Muslim

communities and context-specific adaptation mechanisms that differ between majority and minority settings.

Universal Patterns of Matrilineal Change

The erosion of women's practical authority while symbolic status persists—as documented in the Minangkabau case—parallels patterns observed in other matrilineal Muslim communities globally. Research on the Khasi people of Northeast India shows similar trajectories: women retain cultural reverence but lose decision-making power over land and inheritance due to state legal interventions favoring patrilineal norms (Nongbri, 2000; Roy, 2018). Likewise, studies of the Mosuo in China demonstrate how market integration and formal property registration systematically transfer authority from matrilineal structures to male household heads, even absent religious factors (Mattison, 2011; Walsh, 2005). These cross-cultural parallels suggest that matrilineal systems face common vulnerabilities to modernization: formal legal codification, market commodification of land, nuclear family normalization, and state-imposed administrative structures that assume patrilineal organization.

Context-Specific Mechanisms: Majority versus Minority Dynamics

However, the mechanisms and intensity of transformation vary systematically based on whether communities operate within majority or minority socio-political contexts. In the Minangkabau case—a majority Muslim setting—changes emerge primarily through internal dynamics: educational aspirations, voluntary migration (merantau), individual career choices, and generational value reinterpretation. Women exercise considerable agency in negotiating between traditional expectations and modern opportunities, as evidenced by informants' narratives describing conscious decisions about residence, education, and family structure. In contrast, research on Minangkabau-descended communities in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia reveals more rapid institutional transformation driven by external pressures (Peletz, 2011; Stivens, 2023). Second and third-generation migrants increasingly abandon matrilocal residence not primarily through individual choice but through integration pressures within multiethnic Malaysian society and legal frameworks favoring patrilineal inheritance (Kreager & Schröder-Butterfill, 2008). Similarly, Khasi Muslim communities in India face "compounded marginalization"—pressures from both majority religious communities and state legal systems that assume patrilineal norms (Nongbri, 2000). This creates adaptation mechanisms distinct from the Minangkabau case: faster institutional collapse, reduced individual agency, and limited space for syncretic negotiation between custom and dominant legal frameworks.

Implications for Islamic Family Law Adaptation

These comparative insights illuminate how Islamic family law adapts differently across socio-political contexts. In majority Muslim settings like Minangkabau, the negotiation occurs primarily between shariah and adat, with both systems enjoying legitimacy and communities exercising autonomy in determining their interaction. Women and customary leaders can creatively reinterpret both Islamic jurisprudence and matrilineal customs to accommodate contemporary realities while maintaining cultural-religious identity. In Muslim minority contexts, Islamic family law faces additional constraints from dominant state legal systems. This "triple negotiation" (between shariah, custom, and state law) limits adaptive flexibility and often forces communities toward conformity with patrilineal norms embedded in majority legal frameworks. The

Minangkabau case thus demonstrates Islamic law's inherent adaptability when operating within supportive majority contexts, while minority cases reveal constraints imposed by non-Muslim legal hegemony. The phenomenological insights from Minangkabau women's lived experiences (their conscious navigation of competing demands, creative reinterpretation of traditional roles, and maintenance of cultural identity amid change) suggest that internal agency remains stronger in majority contexts. This agency, however constrained by economic and social pressures, contrasts with the more deterministic external pressures facing matrilineal Muslim minorities. Understanding these differential dynamics is crucial for developing culturally sensitive policies supporting matrilineal communities across diverse socio-political settings.

Comparative Implications for Muslim Minority Contexts

The institutional and value shifts documented in this Minangkabau case offer critical insights for understanding matrilineal Muslim communities in both majority and minority contexts. While Minangkabau operates within a majority Muslim setting where changes emerge primarily through internal dynamics (education, migration, individual agency) research on similar communities in minority contexts reveals more deterministic external pressures. Minangkabau-descended communities in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, for instance, experience faster matrilocal residence abandonment driven by integration pressures within multiethnic society (Peletz, 2011; Stivens, 2023). Similarly, Khasi Muslim communities in India face compounded challenges from both majority religious communities and state legal systems favoring patrilineal norms (Nongbri, 2000). These comparative patterns suggest that while modernization universally challenges matrilineal systems, the mechanisms differ systematically: majority contexts enable gradual, internally-driven adaptation with greater individual agency, while minority contexts impose rapid, externally-driven transformation with limited adaptive space. This distinction illuminates how Islamic family law adapts differently across socio-political settings—operating flexibly within majority contexts through syncretic shariah-adat negotiation, but facing constraints in minority contexts where dominant state legal frameworks limit adaptive flexibility. Understanding these differential dynamics proves crucial for developing culturally sensitive policies supporting matrilineal Muslim communities globally.

4. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study reveals fundamental shifts in Minangkabau women's roles, particularly regarding the traditional position of Bundo Kanduang. Women's responsibilities have shifted from collective matrilineal duties encompassing extended family care, inheritance management, and value transmission toward narrower nuclear family-focused obligations. This transformation is accompanied by the functional decline of key institutions, particularly Rumah Gadang and Bundo Kanduang organizations, reflecting not simple institutional collapse but dynamic negotiation between ancestral expectations and contemporary realities.

Changes result from complex interactions between external factors (globalization, educational access, inter-ethnic marriages) and internal factors (value reinterpretation, declining customary prestige, individual agency). The phenomenological approach reveals that women experience their changing roles as ongoing negotiation rather than passive acceptance, demonstrating how cultural identity is continuously reconstructed through lived practice. These dynamics, while observed in a majority Muslim context, illuminate broader patterns: matrilineal communities in minority settings

face more intense external pressures from dominant patrilineal systems and state legal frameworks, resulting in faster institutional transformation with constrained individual agency.

This comparative dimension demonstrates that Islamic family law's adaptability operates differently across socio-political contexts. In majority Muslim settings like Minangkabau, communities exercise autonomy in syncretic shariah-adat negotiation, enabling gradual, internally-driven adaptation. Conversely, in minority contexts, dominant state legal frameworks constrain this flexibility, forcing rapid conformity to patrilineal norms. Understanding these differential dynamics refines theoretical frameworks for analyzing Islamic law-custom relationships across diverse global settings.

Practically, these findings inform policy development by recognizing that institutional changes reflect internal negotiation rather than cultural erosion. Policies enabling creative adaptation while maintaining core values prove more effective than coercive preservation. For Bundo Kanduang organizations, revitalization requires reimagining institutional functions for contemporary needs, creating urban adaptations, and developing new value transmission forms compatible with modern structures. For Muslim minority communities globally, support mechanisms must address compounded integration pressures through legal recognition of customary practices, community-based education maintaining cultural knowledge, and interfaith dialogue addressing matrilineal-patrilineal tensions.

This study acknowledges limitations including geographical scope (five districts cannot represent all Minangkabau regions), generational focus (primarily current Bundo Kanduang holders rather than younger women), and comparative depth (relying on secondary literature for non-Minangkabau cases). Future research should examine intergenerational perspectives, conduct urban-rural comparative analysis, pursue cross-national research testing majority-minority hypotheses, document institutional innovations, explore contemporary Islamic jurisprudence on matrilineal practices, and investigate men's perspectives to complete the gender dynamics picture.

Ultimately, Minangkabau women's transformation represents complex, ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. Women navigate with agency, creativity, and pragmatism, selectively maintaining valued elements while adapting to new realities. While focused on a majority Muslim context, these findings illuminate broader patterns affecting matrilineal Muslim communities globally. The contrast between internally-driven adaptation in majority settings and externally-pressured transformation in minority contexts reveals how socio-political positioning fundamentally shapes cultural change processes. Understanding these dynamics through women's lived experiences—respecting their agency and adaptive strategies—proves essential for supporting matrilineal Muslim communities worldwide as they navigate tradition, faith, and modernity in contemporary contexts.

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