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## State legal pluralism: the intersection of adat, jinayah, and national penal law in Gayo, Indonesia

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## Chapter II

### The Village in Gayo: From Traditional to Modern

#### Introduction

The discussion of this book starts with legal actors at the village level, which is the locus of the adat institution. From there, the discussion gradually moves to the formal legal institutions of the state. Village institutions are the lowest rung of the government. They channel the interests of the government to the community and, in doing so, they become the subjects of the government's policies. This chapter then serves as foundation for the following chapters to understand the role, interest, power and position of village actors in legal pluralism as well as the effect of legal pluralism on their legal authority.

I take a historical approach in my discussion to give a better and more comprehensive insight into villages institutions in Gayo. Inevitably, this leads me to present the transformation of village politics and law from traditional to modern, including a discussion on the transformation of adat institutions and their relation to social changes in Gayo. The period I cover runs from colonial time to the present. For the historical part of this chapter, I rely on the studies by Snouck Hurgronje and John Bowen who conducted research about two different areas in Gayo in two different periods. Snouck conducted his research on Gayo in 1904, Bowen started in 1982. Together, however, they provide a comprehensive overview of Gayonese's politics, law and social arrangements over time.

State legal pluralism started officially in Aceh province after the government recognized adat as part of its political and legal structure.<sup>7</sup> This inclusion of adat was the outcome of a long armed conflict between the Aceh rebel movement and the Indonesian armed forces. After the national financial crisis, Indonesia's central government sought to restructure the central-periphery relationship and decided to grant special autonomy to Aceh and other provinces where independence movements had engaged in armed struggle. In Aceh the central government allowed the inclusion of adat into the state system as a concession to promote resolution of the conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> After the recognition of adat, all adat institutions have become village institutions. I therefore use adat and village institution, as well as their agents, interchangeably. The adat or village offices exercise traditional authority, enforcing and maintaining local norms and traditions.

At the national level, the financial crisis forced a political shift from authoritarianism towards democracy in 1998-1999. The state's turn to democracy also changed its approach to villages. The Indonesian government issued a series of regulations that allowed all ethnic groups in Indonesia to re-apply their traditional political structures and recognized the enforcement of adat law in the village. The permission on the application of adat law meant that Indonesia returned – at least in part – from the project of legal centralism to legal pluralism with different laws applying to different communities; as it had been applied by the Dutch colonial government (Hadikusuma, 1989, pp. 22–32).

The political and legal shift increased the government's control over the village and affected the social life of the Gayonese. During the New Order, a *reje* (headman) office was the only traditional Gayonese political institution the government recognized, while adat law was invalidated. However, although the New Order successfully abolished local political structures in accordance with the national policy on villages, it did not successfully change the social arrangements of the Gayonese.

Many scholars have warned that the reintroduction of adat in the post-authoritarian era would increase the opportunity for adat agents to use adat as an instrument to oppress less privileged groups and to advance their political interest at the village level (Bouchier, 2007). However, the Gayo case shows that although the government granted the village autonomy, which increased the authority of adat/village elites, it has combined this development with modernization projects that have helped to transform Gayo from a traditional into a more modern community. The government promoted a new and rationalized, political, and legal relationship among the village elites and Gayo communities. In this manner the central government managed to retain a considerable degree of control over the village.

With the inclusion of the adat institutions into the state structure, the government's control over the village has actually become stronger and deeper than it was at the time of the New Order. The government can now implant its own institutions within the village organization, such as policing units and midwife organizations. In addition, the government provides a regular income and government facilities to the elected village functionaries and legitimates their political and legal authority in the village. Adat institutions therefore now rely on and even compete for state resources.

## Gayo Village Polities during the Colonial Era

During my fieldwork I could not find any pre-colonial documents about Gayonese village politics and organization. The oldest source are the writings by Snouck Hurgronje. Snouck based his work on information collected from Gayonese visiting Aceh's coastal areas and from Dutch military expeditions to the area. He provided a comprehensive account of Gayonese politics, law, social relationships and structures, and adat practices.

According to Snouck, Gayo's traditional village polity was structured by four elements known as *Sarak Opat*. The *Sarak Opat* consisted of a lord (*reje*) as the highest political authority, his assistant in adat (*petue*), a clergyman (imam or *imem*), and the subjects (*Anak Buah*). He described the polity as a patriarchal mini-republic (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 66–67).

Snouck's began his observations about Gayonese politics and social structure from the development of a family. According to him, a Gayonese house consisted of nine rooms. Each room was occupied by a nuclear family (husband, wife and their children). In total, the house consisted of nine families of a single paternal bloodline. If the house could no longer accommodate the increasing number of families, a new house would be built (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 64).

The growing number of houses formed a neighborhood of a single common paternal ancestor. The neighborhood was called *suku* (clan or communal subdivision) or *belah* ([communal] division). The members of *belah* called themselves *sudere* (siblings) or *sara ine* (one mother) to identify their relationships. The nature of *sara ine* is agnatic and hierarchical, in which a senior member of a *belah* is privileged and commands more respect than his juniors. This family pattern laid the foundation for the Gayonese patriarchal political system (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 64).

Politically, a *belah* had a governing lord (*reje*), who was elected by members of the *belah*. The members of a *belah* were socio-politically tied to their *reje*. However, if a specific group from a *belah* migrated and created independent political institutions in their new territory, they could, in such circumstance, end their political tie and legal dependence on the *reje* of the former settlement. Although they would thus create separate political institutions, the migrated group maintained their paternal tie to their *belah* of origin by calling its inhabitants and themselves *se-asal* (of one origin). The idea of being of one origin prohibited them from intermarrying. Marriage between *se-asal* members could only be admitted upon a special agreement (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 64–66).

According to Snouck, the kinship-based village political structure of the Gayonese was similar to the Acehnese. However, there were differences regarding

the highest political institution. The functions of *gécik* (head of village), *urëung tuhá* (elderly), *tëungku* (imam), and *anëuk* (the people) offices in the Acehese polity were respectively similar to the function of *reje*, *petue*, *imem*, and *anak buah* in Gayo. However, a *gécik's* political power was limited by an *imëum* (not to confuse with *imem* in the Gayonese terminology). An *imeum* in the Acehese constellation was a head of a *mukim* (parish community). The *mukim* was a political territory consisting of several villages. This territorial significance positioned an *imeum* as a higher political figure governing multiple *géciks*. In Gayo, a *reje's* power was limited by *sudere* (senior *belah* members). The *sudere* played the role of a house of representatives, while a *reje* acted like the president. A *reje* was under the obligation to act in accordance with the *saudere* institution. If the *reje's* decisions deviated too much from what could be tolerated by the *sudere*, they could force a new *reje* election (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 72).

Another difference between the Acehese and Gayonese political structures lies in the scope of political power and loyalty of their members. In Aceh a *gécik's* political power extended over a limited territory. If a villager moved to another village, he ended his socio-political and judicial dependence on his old village. This meant that the *gécik* of the original village would lose his political and legal influence over the migrating member. In contrast, a Gayonese remained tied to his *reje* as long as he did not intentionally form new separate political and legal institutions in the new settlement or shifted his loyalty to the *reje* in the new settlement (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 65,71). This political and legal arrangement remained in place in several parts of Central Aceh until 2004, when the Central Aceh government promoted the reorganization and establishment of new villages.

According to Bowen, the members of the *belah* did not have to be descendants of the same ancestry line, unlike argued by Snouck (Bowen, 1991, pp. 36–37). The marriage pattern of the Gayonese was moreover not exclusively patrilineal. The Gayonese have also practiced a matrilineal pattern of marriage, as for instance in Serbajadi. In that locality, a husband was almost under the obligation to live with his wife's family. It suggests that a *reje* could actually find himself governing people who were related both through a paternal and a maternal lineage (Bowen, 1991, p. 36). These differences correspond with relatively egalitarian versus strictly hierarchical social relations (Bowen, 1991, pp. 40, 48, 84).

Internally, Gayo community is divided in two big cultural communities; Bukit and Ciq. The social structures of these communities are different from each other. In pre-colonial Takengen, the capital of Central Aceh district today, there were three kingdoms: Bukit, Syiah Utama and Linge. These together formed the Bukit

culture, opposing the Ciq of Bebesen. The Ciq were believed to be descendants of Batak from North Sumatra. The Ciq gained equal recognition from the Dutch as the Bukit kingdoms (Bowen, 1991, pp. 52–55).<sup>8</sup> While the Ciq had a fairly homogeneous structure, the Bukit polities consisted of many different lineage structures, forming *belah* that were not connected to the same descendant. Each *belah* was independent and constituted a mini republic. By 1900, the Bukit domain, together with Syiah Utama, consisted of 25 to 30 separate *belah* (Bowen, 1991, p. 81).

The heterogenous lineage structure of the Bukit community, as described by Bowen, is still relevant today. During my fieldwork, many people who identified themselves as Gayonese in fact originated from other parts of Aceh and other regions. Although they are aware of their origin, they share with other Bukit *belah* negative sentiments about the Ciq and the coastal Acehnese community. Take for example Fatimah, who provided me with housing and other support during my fieldwork. She is from coastal Acehnese descent (Pidie), yet, she also claims to be a direct descendant of *reje* Gunung. Sapta, a young man from Kebayakan and my local collaborator, was also from Pidie origin. He is the son of Mustafa Aka who once led the Gayo state institute for adat (MANGGo, *Majelis Adat Negeri Gayo*). Sapta's great-grandfather visited Kebayakan during the colonial era and took an "oath" to become a member of Lot Kala *belah*. Both Fatimah and Sapta, although they are aware of their origin, deny being Acehnese and consciously identify as Gayonese.

The territorial meaning of *belah* in Kebayakan sub-district is different from the one discussed by Bowen for Isak. Kebayakan *belah*, according to the elderly, were in conformity with Snouck's description. *Belah* territory in Kebayakan is a housing complex or a compound, where *reje* and *imem*, as well as other functionaries, live next to each other. There is no territorial boundary between offices as is the case in Isak. In Kebayakan, paddy field areas are shared among *belahs*. The paddy field areas of each *belah* are also considered *belah* territory. This does not mean, however, that other *belah* members can not cultivate a paddy field in another *belah* territory. Fatimah's grandfather for example, who was a member of Gunung *belah*, opened a paddy field in the area belonging to Lot Kala *belah*. Because it was quite far from the Gunung *belah* compound, her grandfather built

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<sup>8</sup> Later, the two cultural communities became known as *Uken* and *Toa*, indicating each a geographical area. *Uken* or upstream is associated with the area of Bukit, Syiah Utama, and Linge, around the shore and headwater of the lake. While *Toa*, or downstream, indicates the area of Ciq, who live close to the river of Peusangan streaming from the lake down to the northern coast of Aceh.

a house in the middle of the paddy field. Nonetheless, he and his family remained part of and expressed loyalty to Gunung *belah* culturally, legally and socio-politically.

A lord of Snouck's 'mini-republic' in Kebayakan ruled more than one *belah*, which is unlike the Isak community described by Bowen. In Kebayakan, the ruler was titled *pengulu* and represented the king of Bukit's interests in the villages, even if in practice he had considerable autonomy. In the past, according to the elderly of Kebayakan community, there were only three village communities in the core Kebayakan sub-district. Each community was a union of many different *belahs*. The first was Gunung Bukit village, inhabited by people from the *belahs* Gunung, central Bukit and Edge Bukit. Second, Lot Kala village where inhabitants from Lot, Wakil (Kala), Gading, Jalil, Cik, and Mude *belahs* settled in. This *belah* territory included the area of Takengen's present city center, before it was divided into several subdistricts in the late 1970s. The third village community was Jongok, which consisted of five *belahs*. Three *belahs* of Jongok community; Asir-Asir, Kemili, and Paya Jeget migrated to other parts of Gayo before the independence of Indonesia. Every migrating *belah* of Jongok community formed an independent mini-republic and cut their socio-political relationship and legal dependence from their origin of Jongok. Each one was ruled by a *pengulu*, except the Bukit community which was ruled directly by the king.

Internally, the village community prohibited marriage between themselves. They still maintain this prohibition as they consider themselves as originating from *sara ine* (one mother). In the past, the prohibition could be lifted only by the agreement of the *reje* from the bride's and the groom's side, which happened in particular when there had been a case of premarital sexual intercourse.

The differences in territorial meanings, power-sharing between *reje* and others offices, and type of village polity among the Gayonese indicate the complexity of Gayonese politics. Snouck, Bowen and this research suggest that there is no single overarching political organization. The absence of such a uniting organization as well as the self-perception of these communities as being egalitarian and autonomous within a mini republic of *belah* has promoted intense political competition among the Gayonese. There is no single political ideology strong enough to bestow power on a particular figure to rule and organize communities above the level of the mini republic. This competition among the Gayonese is reflected in local politics today, particularly during elections when local animosity becomes visible, including between *Uken* and *Toa*.

The following section discusses the changes in political territory of the Gayonese, from *belah* to village. These changes have affected the power

relationship between village functionaries and common villagers in profound ways, after the introduction of democracy in Indonesia since 1998.

### Social Changes from *Belah* to Village

The shift from *belah* to village in Kebayakan sub-district and some other places around the Lake of Lot Tawar, such as Toweren and Bintang took place only recently. For about 32 years of Suharto's reign, the village was merely an administrative territory. However, the New Order regime abolished traditional political structures, but it did not succeed in changing the social relations of *belah* and their loyalty to the *reje* which underpinned local politics and legal practices. The New Order government also never succeeded in abolishing adat.

Other traditional socio-political structures in Sumatra such as the Nagari system in the Minangkabau community of West Sumatra and the Marga system in the Rejang-Lebong community of South Sumatra were severely affected by the process of making villages uniform across Indonesia. The Nagari and Marga Lebong consisted of more than one structured settlement (*koto* (Minangkabau)) or village (Rejang-Lebong) (Galizia, 1996, pp. 136; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann, 2013, pp. 48). The *Nagari* and *Marga* are historically different: the *Nagari* has been a socio-political structure since the pre-Islamic time, whereas the *Marga* was created by the Dutch for colonial purposes (Galizia, 1996, pp. 136).

The Nagari and Marga systems lost their traditional significance after the central government divided them into several villages and forced the application of the uniform village organization. This disoriented feelings of social belonging and communal relationship, and changed the cultural structures and the adat leaders' authority because they were organized by and associated with the *Nagari* offices (Galizia, 1996, pp. 136; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann, 2013, pp. 48). The villages became dependent on the government and more autonomous from the Nagari. Although the role of the adat office is still observable now in the village, it is less determining, as it only deals with minor issues such as *Pusako* allocation, inheritance, land and minor disputes. Meanwhile, Marga became impaired as they were less grounded in the local political culture (Galizia, 1996, pp. 159).

The difference between the Gayonese and their Sumatran counterparts lies in the territorial structure underlying the socio-political constellation and leadership mechanism. The Gayonese do not have such a complex socio-political structure as the *Nagari* or *Marga*. Although some *belahs* share the same territory and are led by one *reje*, such as Lot Kala, Gunung-Bukit and Jongok, they live as an independent village community. In this structure, the *belahs* resemble small neighborhoods forming a village. Each *reje* of a *belah* acts as head of neighborhood



in his own territory. The *reje* of the village is elected through an open *musyawarah* (deliberation) process which involves all members of the community. The absence of hereditary claims in local leadership of Kebayakan allows the community to elect the most meritorious individual as their *reje*. This leadership organization is dissimilar to the *Wali Nagari* of Minangkabau, in which leadership is hereditary. It is also unlike the *Pasirah*, in which the leadership structure is one of a collegial nature, consisting of elderly led by a wise man among them in the adat institution (Galizia, 1996). As such, the open election and meritocracy in Gayo made the *reje* office more in line with the New Order village policy, which replaced *reje* with village heads (*Kepala Desa*).

The meaning of territory in Gayo was relatively flexible. One could inhabit another *belah* compound but remain part of one's *belah* of origin. In Kebayakan, for example, all three big communities – Gunung-Bukit, Jongok, and Lot Kala – lived side by side in a centralized compound surrounded by a large paddy field area. When a village compound was fully occupied, a person might move to another village or *belah* housing complex or further away to the paddy field area. This person was still considered part of his *belah* of origin and was registered as such by the State Population and Civil Registration Agency. As a result, a village could include residents of many different *belahs* who were not registered as residents of the village.

The *reje* was the central political figure to the Gayonese and to whom the members of the *belah* expressed their loyalty. The *reje* and his assistant took care of all the communal needs, such as dealing with important life events (birth, marriage and death) and rituals, even if the member lived in another *belah's* territory. An example is Kala Lengkiu village before its inhabitants cut their political and legal ties from Gunung *belah*. Their dwellings were part of Lot Kala territory, but because most of the members were part of Gunung *belah*, their political, legal, religious and cultural needs were managed by the village offices of Gunung *belah*. The Kala Lengkiu members also expressed their loyalty to the *reje* from their *belah* of origin. For example, they would always conduct important prayers (Friday, Ramadhan, and *Eid Al-Fitr* prayers) in the mosque of the Gunung compound, although halfway to the mosque they passed another mosque located in Lot Kala *belah*, so much closer than the mosque of Gunung *Belah*. Deceased would also be buried in the graveyard of their *belah* of origin.<sup>9</sup>

The *belah's* socio-political allegiance to the original *reje* drastically changed after the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. Law 22/1999 on Regional

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<sup>9</sup> Such obligations to a deceased ended around the 1980s as a result of the continuous islamization process in the area.

Governance promoted the creation of a new province, district/municipality, and villages, and the Aceh provincial government created five new districts in 2002. In the same year, the Central Aceh government started the preparations for creating new villages. In response many communities established new independent villages. The creation of new villages made that villages in Kebayakan sub-district overlapped far less with *belah* than before. It also moved the administration of adat law from the *belah* to the internal village where more than one *belah* and ethnic group reside together, and it changed the legal and political authority of *reje* from persons to territory. In Kebayakan, Lot Kala is an exception, as the six *belahs* have remained united as part of the Lot Kala community, administratively, culturally and politically. Thus, the *reje* of Lot Kala still rules more than one *belah*.

In 2004, after a preparation of about two years, five villages officially seceded. Gunung Bukit village, consisting of Central Bukit and Edge Bukit *belahs*, became Gunung village and Bukit village. Jongkok village divided into Jongkok Meluem and Jongkok Bathin villages. These two *belahs*, Meluem and Bathin, were separated due to a deep discrepancy in socio-religious practices. Meluem *belah* members identify as modernist Muslims while Bathin consider themselves as traditionalists. Mendale village is inhabited by equal mixes of *belahs* from Gunung, Kala, and both *belah* of Jongkok. Meanwhile, as mentioned, Kala Lengquio village is dominated by the Gunung *belah*. These two villages, Mendale and Kala Lengquio, were paddy fields areas with a small number of houses situated in the middle of the paddy field in Lot Kala village territory. They aspired to become new independent villages because they are situated quite far from their *belah* of origin and they did not want to be part of Lot Kala village either, which was closer. By creating a separate new village, they could manage their affairs independently.

Many new proposed villages did not meet the requirements. There should be at least 800 heads of household as regulated for Sumatra Island by Article 8 (3) of Law 6/2004 on Villages. Proposed villages such as Jongkok Bathin, Kala Lengquio and Mendale villages, only had 200 heads of household or even fewer. Nevertheless, they succeeded by falsifying the number of inhabitants to reach the minimum requirement. According to the first *reje* of Jongkok Bathin, Syech Junaidi, the official in charge at the state institution only relied on the documents and did not verify their validity.

Although the *reje* generally justified the creation of new villages by pointing at overpopulation, I observed that another reason was the possibility it created to get extra funding from the central government. Since 2015, the central government has promoted national developmental programs and disbursed huge development

funds through the Village Fund program (RRI, 2016; Portalsatu, 2017). The creation of more villages helped to extract more development funds from this program.

The creation of new villages also relates to local political elites' long-term plan to divide Central Aceh district into a municipality and a district – Takengen and Central Aceh – and to create a new province Aceh Lauser Antara (ALA). This province would consist of Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, Gayo Lues, Southeast Aceh, Singkel district, and Takengen municipality. These regions share anthropological characteristics and their inhabitants were classified as one adat group by Van Vollenhoven.

The creation of villages has moved the centrality of the original *belah* to the village community. During the application for the creation of new villages, the applicant must register the names of those who would like to be part of the community of the proposed village. Once the proposal is accepted, those who are registered then become official members of the new village. This reorganization of village membership promoted by the government suggests that the individual *belah* member has to cut the political tie from his *belah* of origin and shift his allegiance to the new *reje*.

The shift from *belah* to village has been followed by a shift of the juridical authority of *reje* from persons to the territory of the village. In the old system, as mentioned earlier, the *reje* was responsible for the political, cultural, legal, and religious needs of his members living in another *belah*'s territory. A member of a *belah* could not marry someone from the same *belah* even if they lived outside of the *belah* territory. If such a marriage happened, a *reje* could impose an adat punishment. With the reorganization of village and village membership, the *reje* has lost this authority and responsibility over persons living outside of the *belah* territory.

This shift has changed the application of adat law from persons to territory. Now, adat law can be enforced on village members whose cultural background is diverse. It cannot be enforced to *belah* members living in another village. The major example is the law on endogamous marriage, which is an adat law aspect still maintained today. In the past, as Snouck informs us, all *belah* members, scattered anywhere, were subject to this law. Now, parents of the wedding couple can agree on a wedding although the prospective bride and groom originate from the same *belah*. This legal development is problematic for those who originate from elsewhere, as now Javanese and those of other ethnic origin have become subject to the adat law as well. They can also be temporarily exiled (*farak*), as will be discussed in chapter IV.

The following section discusses the political changes that have followed the territorial changes of the Gayonese village. These have contributed to the increase in individualism in Gayonese society.

### Changes in Village Polity

This section portrays the changes in village political structure, village elections, and how they have influenced the power relations between the *reje* and his subjects. These changes started to happen after the government reinforced traditional political structures and adat law. I will take the situation in colonial times, as documented by Snouck Hurgronje, as my point of departure, starting with an outline of the traditional structure of Gayonese villages.

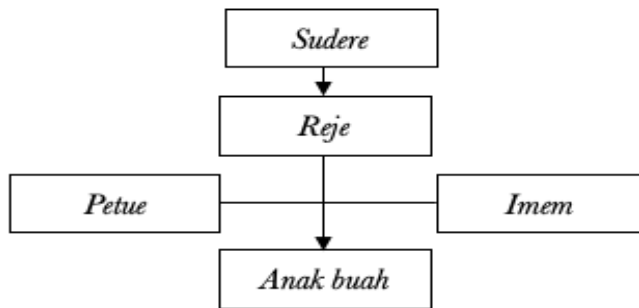
The Gayonese village consists of four offices, which is known as *Sarak Opat* (four [offices] in one [village]). According to Snouck, in his time, the *Sarak Opat* was led by a *reje* who ruled over all *adat* matters. The *reje* could also appoint a representative (*penghulu*) in other dwellings that had not separated from their original *belah*.

A *reje* was installed by his senior male kin in the patriarchal *belah*. He had to cooperate with them in governing communal affairs. He was assisted by two other offices: the assistant for the adat (*petue*) and the *imem*. *Petue* were also appointed by the *belah* members to assist the *reje*. The *imem* usually came from one family because fathers taught their sons. The *imem* oversaw *hukum* (Islamic law) and other religious affairs of the *belah*. Like the *reje's* authority, which was limited by his kin, the *imem's* authority was limited by the *reje*. The *anak buah* or the subjects of the *belah* constituted the last element (office) of the *Sara Kopat*. Although the people were subject to the political and legal authority of the other three institutions (*reje*, *imem* and *petue*), the senior kin member controlling the *reje's* authority were also part of the *anak buah* (Snouck Hurgronje, 1996, pp. 66,71). This political structure positioned the *anak buah* as the ultimate authority in village politics.

The *imem* had most tasks of these four. An *imem* was always consulted about religious issues including unlawful sexual intercourse, which was (and still is) considered as the most shameful act in Gayo and against the teaching of Islam. The *imem* was also responsible for managing religious activities and rituals such as the celebration of the Prophet's birth, marriage, circumcision, birth and death rituals.

*Petue* (elderly) or the assistant for adat law affairs was supposed to be a wise and well-experienced individual. He was the legal officer at the village who defended adat law and worked as investigator of the cases tried in the village/adat tribunal. Although a legal officer, the *petue* could not impose punishments. These

had to be decided by all *Sarak Opat* offices through the adat tribunal. The *anak buah* were represented in the tribunal by the senior kin considered most knowledgeable. In some situations, youths of the community also appeared in the tribunal, when it dealt with particular cases concerning security and morality, e.g., sexual offenses. This pre-New Order village political organization may be best pictured in the following diagram.



Pre-New Order village structure of Gayonese

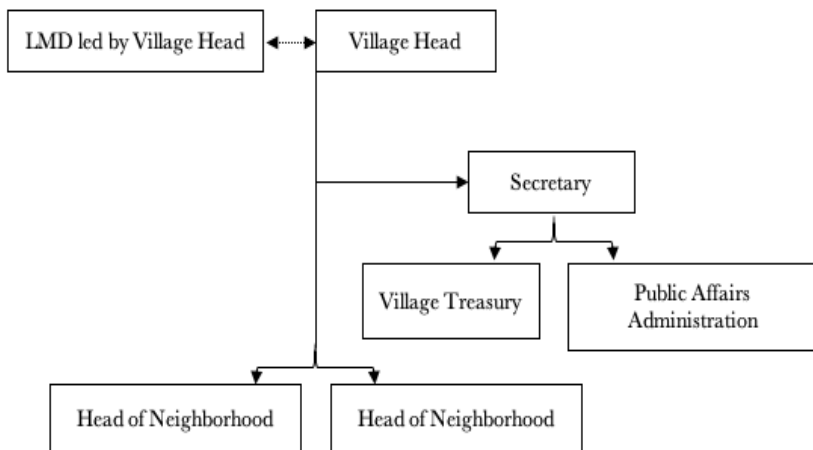
Changes in the *Sarak Opat* structure began after Suharto started his political and development programs by issuing Law 4/1974 on the Principles of Regional Government. This law centralized Indonesia's political system. The central government utilized all political institutions from the regional government to the village to implement central government policies and programs. It turned all regions into administrative units implementing its policies.

In 1974, Suharto abolished Aceh's status as a special province in matters of religion, education, and culture. He issued a statement that "the name of the Special Region of Aceh is only a name; the regulation that is valid in the Special Region of Aceh is the same with other regulations that are valid in other provinces. There is no uniqueness" (Djalil, 2006, pp. 165). This policy was part of the central government's development mantra that demanded the enforcement of one law for all. The policy ended all steps made by the Aceh government to implement Sharia law, develop an Islamic education system and promote adat law (Morris, 1983, pp. 270–283).

Five years later, Law 5/1979 on Village Government (*Pemerintahan Desa*) imposed the same structure on all political and administrative units at village level throughout Indonesia. According to Article 3, the village political institution consisted of the Head of Village (*Kepala Desa*) and Village Community Council (LMD, *Lembaga Masyarakat Desa*). These were supported by a secretary and head of neighborhood. For the sake of unity and uniformity, Suharto did not only abolish all traditional institutions and structures across the archipelago, but also

uniformed gender roles by introducing programs such as Guidance of Family Welfare (PKK, *Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*). The program, according to many observers, was contrary to the nature and role of women in Aceh province because it domesticated women, who were used to play an active role in society and the economy (Sulaiman, 2006, pp. 174–177).

The new policy on the village forced the Gayonese to adapt the old structure of *Sarak Opat* into the new village structure. The *imem* office was removed from the formal village structure, *petue* and *anak buah* were merged and converted to LMD, an office whose members were limited to seven persons and who were led by the *Kepala Desa*. They acted as representatives of the village members. Officially, only the *reje* remained, but now with the uniform title of Village Head (*Kepala Desa*). The *Kepala Desa* was assisted by a secretary and three other administrative officials. As we will later see, some of the New Order village institutions have remained until today, even if the Aceh Government could have removed them under the special autonomy status. The structure of the village political institutions, as regulated by the Law 5/1979, is pictured in the following diagram.



Village structure under the New Order of Suharto

The New Order village structure granted the *Kepala Desa* the absolute power in the village. It controlled the LMD office, which by local tradition should be more authoritative than the *Kepala Desa*, and thus reflected the authoritarianism of Indonesia under Suharto at the national level.

In 1992, the Central Aceh government tried to undermine the New Order village structure by inserting the Gayonese traditional model into the state

structure. T.M Yoesoef Zainoel, Regent of Central Aceh reinstated *Sarak Opat* when he issued Decree 045/12/SK/92 on Gayo Adat Institutions in Central Aceh District. Article 4 of the Decree stated that *Sarak Opat* is the organizational structure of every governance level: district, sub-district, and village (or town neighborhood). Article 5 detailed the political position at each level. It stated that at the district level the regent represents the *reje* while the Head of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) of Central Aceh acts as an *imem*. The head of the Adat and Culture Council of Aceh (LAKA, *Lembaga Adat dan Kebudayaan Aceh*) of Central Aceh branch acts as *petue* while the house of Representatives of Central Aceh acts as, and represents the *rayat* as they participate in making decisions based on consensus. The same structure applied to the lower administrative levels of the sub-district and village.

According to Yusen Saleh and Mahmud Ibrahim, these articles found their legal foundation in the special status Aceh had been granted by the Old Order Regime of Sukarno in 1959.<sup>10</sup> However, according to them, the decree could not be implemented because changing the national terminology would be interpreted as challenging the central government. According to Mahmud Ibrahim the decree meant to accommodate the call from local people to preserve culture and tradition.

Despite all of its power, the New Order regime was unable to enforce its policy to the village level and in practice little changed. The clearest example is the crucial role the *imem* continued to play. He remained the second most important village official despite his removal from the formal structure of the village.

According to Hidayah Syah, who occupied the *imem* office of Jongkok Bathin *belah* for more than twenty years, the *imem* office is a voluntary post. Aside from being linked to the village mosque, the *imem* deals with all religious and rituals events in the community. According to Syah, an *imem* is always prepared to solve communal issues and to be the first person for a consultation regarding domestic conflicts, inheritance, religious obligations like death and hajj, and offenses such as sexual deviances. In many parts of Gayo, the *imem* position is a life term or until the office holder moves to another village, unlike the village head who can be re-elected twice and thus serve a maximum of 18 years.

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<sup>10</sup> To persuade Daud Beureu'eh's group to end their rebellion demanding a separate Islamic state from Indonesia, the Prime Minister of Indonesia promulgated a Degree No. 1/Misi/1959 *tentang Perubahan Propinsi Aceh Menjadi Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh*. The Decree allowed Aceh to officially develop its own religious, educational and cultural aspects (Sulaiman, 2006, pp. 132).

### *The Gayo Village after the New Order*

The village political structure changed after the granting of special autonomy to Aceh in Law 44/1999 and Law 18/2001 on Special Autonomy for Aceh. These laws restored Aceh's special status in religion, culture, and education, as well as the role of *ulama* in local governance. This resulted in the creation of parallel government institutions from province to district to implement the special autonomy of Aceh. Among these is also the Aceh Adat Assembly (MAA, *Majelis Adat Aceh*).

The MAA has been designed to promote and coordinate the development of adat in Aceh. Among the regulations made by this institution is Regional Regulation (as from 2002 called Qanun) 7/2000 on Facilitating Adat Life (*Penyelenggaraan Kehidupan Adat*). This regulation and subsequent ones have restored and strengthened the task and authority of all traditional institutions in Aceh at the village level. As a result, to speak of adat institutions is to speak of village institutions.

As part of Aceh province, Central Aceh district government issued district Qanun 10/2002 on Gayo Adat Law, re-introducing the traditional political structure and some aspects of adat law. Unlike provincial and other district governments in Aceh province, which have separated Shari'a from adat in two different qanuns, Central Aceh integrated them into a single one. Later, in 2011, Central Aceh issued Qanun 4/2011 on Village Governance, which is a localized version of Aceh Province Qanun 9/2008 on Supervising the life of Adat and Customs (*Pembinaan Kehidupan Adat dan Adat Istiadat*), Qanun 10/2008 on Adat Institutions (*Lembaga Adat*) and Qanun 4/2009 on the Procedures for Selection and Dismissal of Village Heads in Aceh Province (*Tata Cara Pemilihan dan Pemberhentian Geucik di Provinsi Aceh*). Aside from giving authority to adat functionaries to run and control the adat/village tribunal, the district Qanun 4/2011 democratized village elections. It regulates that *reje* and *imem* have to be elected democratically following the national system on presidential or mayoral elections. It thus abolished the *musyarawah* system that had been used at the village level for decades. Moreover, *reje* and *imem* can now serve only two terms of five years.

Qanun 4/2011 more or less reintroduced the *Sara Kopat* structure in the Gayonese village. The *Sarak Opat* consists of four elements; *reje*, *imem*, *petue*, and *Rayat Genap Mupakat* (RGM) or representatives of the people, which replaces the old term of *anak buah* or *rayat*. However, the power relationship between the different offices does not follow the old system nor does it maintain the power relationship set up by the New Order. Based on the Qanun, a *reje* is no longer acting as the most powerful institution in the village, as designed by the



New Order, nor is it controlled by the *sudere* as described by Snouck. Since all posts are elected either directly by all village members (*reje* and *imem* offices) or representatives of the neighborhood (for the *petue*), the *reje* is now equal to other offices with whom it must coordinate public affairs of the village. A *reje* has to consult with three other offices before taking any important decision. This situation is almost similar to the *reje's* limited power before the arrival of the Dutch, but in a more democratic system. The current structure of the village polity is shown in the following diagram of Lot Kala village.



This structure of Lot Kala village organization is based on Central Aceh Qanun No. 4/2011 on Governance of village

Although the *reje* is no longer superior to the *imem*, *petue*, and RGM, the office has a direct hierarchical relationship with other functionaries. This is shown by the solid line from the *reje* to his secretary (*Banta*). Below the *Banta* are assistants in the field of welfare, economic affairs, and general affairs. These offices were introduced by the New Order administration. Three other positions under the *Banta* are the Gayo traditional institutions monitoring the lake (*Pengulu Lot*), the river downstream (*Pengulu Kala*) and the river upstream (*Pengulu Mampak*). Their presence in a village structure can be adjusted to specific village needs and geographical situation. In addition, there are offices based on government programs, such as the official midwife (*biden*), Community Police (Bhabinkamtibmas, *Bintara Pembina Keamanan dan Ketertiban Masyarakat*) from the Police Department and the Non-commissioned Law Enforcement Officer of the Indonesian Military Forces (Babinsa, *Bintara Pembina Desa*). The last office is set up at sub-district level for monitoring security in several villages within jurisdiction of the sub-district.

This structure suggests that the revival and reapplication of traditional political structures is an improvement over traditional adat. The government has made adjustments to respond to the modern economic, political and administrative needs at this level. The following section discusses the change in village politics after the revival of adat. It looks at the change of elections, the move from *musyawarah* to democracy and the changes in the power relationship between the *reje* and his subjects, and the change in social relationship between the villagers from reciprocal to non-reciprocal.

### **The Election: Competition for the State Sources**

One of the major changes in the village today compared to the New Order era is the intervention in village politics by the central government, represented by the district government. The government organizes the village administration, democratizes elections, distributes political power to many offices, gives regular financial support and legitimates the power of those operating the adat/village offices. In this manner the government transforms the village from traditional to modern and, at the same time, increases the government's control over village politics. These developments make the village apparatus or elites dependent on state resources.

The central government's developmental and social engineering projects at the village level and the democratic elections have contributed to the transformation of the social and political relationship between the village officials and the community, and between the village officials themselves. Both *reje* and *imem* are no longer respected as in the past, for they are now considered as professionals paid by the government to serve the community.

The government's developmental programs for the villages, the Village Fund program, the monthly regular income for *reje* and *imem*, the facilities, and other training with financial benefits, have loosened social cohesion and increased political competition. In 2014, the central government enacted Regulation 43/2014 on the Implementation of Regulation of Law 6/2014 (*Peraturan Pelaksanaan Undang-Undang No. 6 Tahun 2014*) which allows the government to allocate and transfer the government's developmental budget directly to the village through the Village Fund Program. This bottom up developmental approach is the realization of Jokowi's political campaign "developing from the edges" (Kemenkeu, 2017, pp. 24). In 2015 and 2016, President Jokowi's administration disbursed around IDR 67,37 trillion in total directly to the village's bank account to accelerate development in the peripheries. (Kemenkeu, 2017, pp. 20). This amount has increased over time (Abidin, 2018).

As the highest political authority in the village, the *reje* is the most authoritative figure to decide on the use of the Village Fund (Sumarna, 2015; Sumolang, 2017, pp. 31). Some *rejes* operate in quite an authoritarian manner in allocating the use of the fund and eliminate any potential threat to their control over it. According to Alpin, village fund coordinator of Pegasing sub-district of Central Aceh, since 2015-2017 more than ten *banta* (village secretaries), who assist in administering funds for villages, across Central Aceh district were reassigned to other state institutions, because of their opposition against the *reje*'s strict control over the village fund.

Concurrently, the variety of financial support and facilities from the government and the new election system at the village now make the *imem* office a contested position. During the New Order, the *imem* office was the most "sacred" office, since the *imem* was regarded as religiously and morally superior to other village leaders. It was moreover a voluntary post and their moral quality was considered more important than their religious knowledge.

The same idea concerning the *imem* office is also found in other parts of Aceh province. Muhammad Sahlan, a lecturer at the Sociology of Religion department at the State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry, describes the heavy burden of being an *imem* as follows: "...removing the village head from the office is quite normal. And there are many. The removed village head is still accepted to stay in the village. But, removing the *imem* from the office is disgraceful. We have to conceal the removal from outsiders and the *imem* has to leave the village immediately." He added that only those who are considered as righteous, stable, and virtuous can be nominated for the office. Consequently, in the past few people registered to be nominated as *imem*. Today, however, this is different. Although the *imem*'s monthly income is lower than the income of the *reje* and *banta*, the motorbike facility from the district government and other bonuses from the sub-district Office for Religious Affairs (KUA, *Kantor Urusan Agama*) and the State Agency for Shari'a (DSI, *Dinas Syariat Islam*), are quite attractive and thus have drawn more candidates.

However, state and local government intervention into village politics in Gayo, is not as deep as in some other places in Indonesia. District elites like in Sumberjaya and Way Tenong, for example, draw villages into higher level political competition to secure state resources. In doing so, the interests of political parties extends to the village, which creates new 'oligarchs' in the villages (Kusworo, 2014, pp. 78–99). In Gayo, the village has remained autonomous from district elites or higher political interests.

The following case of *imem* elections in Mendale village shows the competition for resources driving the pursuit of political office. In this case the former *imem*, Mussana, resigned because he was promoted to become Head of Academic Affairs of Gajah Puteh Islamic Institute of Central Aceh. To substitute Mussana, the *reje* proposed his younger brother, Muzakir, who was at the time serving as *petue*. Before he was appointed *petue* in 2011, Muzakir had already served as *imem*. The proposal to return Muzakir to the position of *imem* caused conflict in the village. Some suspected that the *reje* wanted to build a family dynasty in the village to secure all facilities from the government to his kin, as Amin had already appointed two of his brothers to be the heads of the two (out of four) neighborhoods in the village.

Some community members started a movement against the *reje*'s proposal. They proposed three candidates. Of these Saifullah was the strongest, but it appeared to be difficult to convince him to stand for election. After many appeals, Saifullah sought advice from Hidayat Syah, who had been *imem* in Jongkok Bathin village for more than twenty years, and who finally convinced him to stand for election.

When I later interviewed him, Hidayat Syah said that Saifullah was actually not ready to become *imem*. He did not have much of a background in Islamic studies. Until the age of 15, Saifullah received basic Islamic instruction from his parents and an *imem* of a traditional Islamic boarding school in his village. With this educational background, Saifullah thought he was unfit for the office of *imem*. However, Hidayat Syah promised to train him to become a proper imam. "There is no better office for anyone than *imem*. The office controls our deeds and trains us in Islamic studies. It must be seen as a gift, not as a burden," Hidayat Syah recalled his advice to Saifullah.

One week before Saifullah and another candidate registered for the election, the *Reje* of Mendale village gathered the community in the village hall to evaluate the preparations for the election. Knowing no one had registered yet except for his brother, he suggested to appoint his brother by acclamation. But this proposal was rejected. The meeting demanded that the *Reje* respect the process and election schedule. On the election day, Saifullah won the election with 210 out of 290 votes.

Since the state started providing financial resources and facilities to the village, the village politics have been quite dynamic and lively. The *imem* office is now an attractive position for people as the facilities and funding from the government can provide extra resources for members of a deprived agricultural community like Mendale. Elections and appointments have thus become a new arena for village politics.

People can only influence this process directly through elections in the case of *reje* or *imem*. Other offices such as secretary and treasurer, which are key in managing village development and controlling the use of the Village Fund money, are appointed by the *reje* with the agreement of other officials. This procedure has enabled the *reje* of Mendale village to appoint three of his brothers to become *petue* and heads of neighborhoods in the village.

### *Modernizing the Election*

The election procedure that brought Saifullah to the *imem* office was simple and straightforward. It was held inside the local mosque and attended by both male and female senior villagers. According to those who witnessed the process, the candidate sat facing the attendees. Everyone was asked to write his or her choice on a small piece of paper and then to fold and drop the paper into a ballot. Then, the committee picked the small folded papers and read each vote loudly to all the attendees while an assistant counted the votes.

Later, the election was modernized by adopting an election system similar to how governors or the president are elected, but some villages have introduced such election mechanisms earlier. The villages of Sumber Jaya and Way Tenong sub-district in Lampung province, for example, have run democratic village head elections since 2003. In these villages the election design is somewhat formal, with an opening speech from the head of the sub-district before the start of the election. Moreover, the political cost was quite high. The practices of money politics at the village level was quite similar to those at higher levels, where candidates had to sell their belongings to support their campaigns (Kusworo, 2014, pp. 79–91). In some other villages in Yogyakarta, Riau, and East Java, the district government has intervened in the election by designing the qualifications of candidates so as to favor particular ones and requiring ‘consultation’ with candidates before the elections start (Salim *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, in other villages in Indonesia the most qualified candidates were facilitated by the Law 4/2006 to participate in village politics as this Law introduced a democratic system to reduce the political domination of the local oligarchy (Antlöv, Wetterberg and Dharmawan, 2016).

In Gayo, such political demand and intervention of district government or elites is relatively scarce. The participation of youths in the village election has had more influence in determining who gets to be elected, as shown in the previous and following cases.

In the first week of my second visit to Gayo in July 2017, I found that the youth of Mendale village, led by Iskandar Syah, had organized a *reje* election. Two candidates appeared in the election: M. Amin, the incumbent *reje*, and Syahrul.

Syahrul was not a popular candidate, as he had rarely been involved in village activities. However, he was seen by his supporters as the most potential candidate against the incumbent because of his involvement in the district government development projects outside the village. They expected Syahrul to bring developmental projects to Mendale.<sup>11</sup>

The details of the process are indeed no different from presidential or gubernatorial election. The elections were organized under the national jargon of “*luber and jurdil*.” *Luber* stands for *langsung, umum, bebas, rahasia* (direct, public, free, and secret). *Jurdil* stands for *jujur dan adil* (honest and fair). Based on the jargon, Iskandar Syah and his team announced the new election procedure and who has the right to vote. Each voter would be given an invitation letter which must be shown at the registration desk during the election. Another measure was that the voter’s finger should be inked to mark that (s)he had voted. They also set a minimum age to vote at 17.

Some elderly members advised the committee to make the election simple. There are only 191 households in Mendale village, and all inhabitants know each other well. However, Iskandar Syah, the head of the election committee, insisted that they should try a new system that could guarantee the participation of all community members. Aside from the wish to follow the procedure prescribed by the Village Law 6/2014, the Committee also wanted to make sure that everyone would be informed of the election and the result of the election.

In the old system of *musyawarah*, which was often conducted after noon, many people were not aware of the election, even if it had been announced publicly. Consequently, some people did not know who was their new *reje*. The youth commission therefore intended to turn the village head elections into a big event. It had to be a “*pesta demokrasi di desa* (celebration of democracy in the village),” said Iskandar Syah. He added that the Committee, consisting of only

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<sup>11</sup> In other parts of Aceh, Syahrul’s close relationship with the government and his capacity to lobby developmental projects from the executive and legislative members of the local House of Representative for the village are among important qualifications that can bring him to the head of the village office. The villagers are quite concerned with the quality of infrastructure, economic opportunity, job opportunities and other economical sources, which have now become the responsibility of the head of village in the post-Tsunami and conflict era (Kloos, 2018, pp. 100–103). I have observed the same situation in the Lelabu village of Bebesen subdistrict. At the time this research was conducted, the village was led by a young man who was around 34 years old. His cleverness in lobbying the government brought several development projects to the village, which satisfied his village members. Saifullah, the just elected *imem* of Mendale, has the same capacity. Before he was elected as an *imem*, he was busy with agricultural, forestry, and fishery projects in the village which he obtained through lobbying local politician and members of the Central Aceh House of Representative. These projects benefited many members of his village, both financially and agriculturally.

youth from the village, would lead the preparations, so it would not impose any burden on elderly who proposed the simple way. Eventually the committee's proposal was accepted by acclamation.

All the state officials from the sub-district of Kebayakan attended the election, which was held in front of the village mosque. The head of the sub-district, the head of the sub-district police station and the head of the parish community (*mukim*) attended the election as observers and witnesses. They represented the following district officials: the regent, the head of the police station, and the Adat office respectively.

The new election system made voters know each other even better. The Gayonese generally refer to each other by the name of their first child. For instance, if this child is called Rita, her parents will be referred to as *aman* or *inen* Rita (Rita's father or mother). It is improper to call someone by his or her original name. Many participants were confused when a man with a microphone standing in front of the designed entrance called the surname of the voters one by one. Some participants said they liked the procedure, because it allowed them to get to know each other's original names.

In this new election model, the committee provided the vote papers in the same format as in mayoral or presidential elections, in which pictures of the candidates were printed out and appeared on the papers. The voter who was called would receive the paper at the entrance where (s)he had to show the invitation letter from the community. The vote would be counted if a mark was made on the picture or the name of the candidate. The marking was conducted in a tiny room provided in the middle of the arena. After making the choice, the voters should fold the paper and drop it into a ballot box provided at the exit, whereupon they would have their fingers inked before leaving the location.

Based on the election slogan of '*Jurdil dan Luber*', the committee ensured that the counting of the votes was transparent and fair not only for the candidate, but also for the participants. After 14.00 PM, the committee, observed by sub district officials and attendees, started counting. Although many village members observed the process directly, the committee still assigned particular people as witnesses for each candidate, avoiding potential manipulation from the committee. After counting, the committee announced that M. Amin had won the election. He secured the office for another five years (2017-2022).

The new election model for the *reje* was a successful introduction, considering that it was the first election of that kind in the village. However, Bangka Wali, one of the committee members, admitted that such a system was actually unnecessary in a village like Mendale. Bangka added that the new election model was more

complicated and costly than the traditional election. Yet, he added, it is still important to upgrade the electing system for making sure that everyone gets involved and knows their new *reje* directly after the election. Bangka further thanked the Village Fund program. Although, the new election was expensive, as they had to buy boxes and other equipment, these expenses were covered by the program. Using the same fund, other villages such Lot Kala organized the same ‘modern’ election for the *imem*. It seems such elections are becoming a new standard for *reje* and *imem* election in Central Aceh, at least in urban and semi-urban area like Kebanyakan.

After the election, the committee has to submit the report to the district government for validation. This process is required before the government can start paying the monthly salary of the *reje*, *imem* and other village functionaries, as regulated by Qanun 5/2003 on Village Governance. The Qanun states that all village/adat functionaries are given a regular income from the district annual income. Since 2003, all officials receive a regular salary and some of them are given facilities by the government. A *reje* gets a regular income of IDR. 2,000,000/month and a “red flat” state motorbike. An *imem* now receives IDR. 650,000/month. Other officials, the head of the RGM, the head of neighborhood and the division undersecretary get the same amount of salary as the *imem*. The vice-RGM gets only IDR. 350,000/month, which is the lowest. These incomes will increase in the future. Aside from the salary, the *imem* and *Banta*<sup>12</sup> also get “a red flat” motorbike.

In summary, village functionaries are now government officials whose authorities are legitimated by the government, and whose income comes from the district government. Through various government regulations (Indonesian Laws and Qanuns), the central government and province have managed to replicate their political and governance system in the village in all of its aspects: elections, village governance structure, and progress reports of village development. The paradoxical result is that in the name of village autonomy the power of the central government over the village has actually increased.

### *The Impact of Democratic Election*

Before the introduction of democratic elections, both *reje* and *imem* were directly appointed by the people through *musyawarah*. Many people in Kebanyakan still believe that the *musyawarah* is a better procedure for appointing

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<sup>12</sup> A village secretary appointed before 2013 is still a permanent civil servant (Regulation 45/2007 on Requirement and Procedure for Appointing Secretary of Village to State official). Village secretaries recruited after 2012 hold a non-permanent position, similar as the *reje* and other officials.



village leaders, because they can put pressure on a good and qualified person to lead them.

In the traditional election, a candidate's name was proposed by attendees during the *musyawarah*. According to all my respondents from the elderly group in Kebayakan, people would propose someone from the local member of the village because of his competence and personality. Sometimes, wealth was also considered as qualification as the people expected that the *reje* could pay the *zakat* (alms) for the villagers who were very poor. This happened for instance in Gunungbukit Kebayakan around 1980s. The candidate had the opportunity to reject or accept his candidacy. However, according to all my respondents in four different villages in Kebayakan, the candidate would seldom decline because of the pressure from the attendees.

A simple vote system was also practiced. If two names appeared during the *musyawarah*, the forum would vote by writing down each attendee's preference. The vote was to end the deadlock. In such situation, most of the attendees knew already who would be their next *reje* because the vote was mainly meant to honor the less qualified candidate and as a way to avoid tension in the *musyawarah*. Moreover, attendees of the *musyawarah* would be able to evaluate the candidate's qualifications because they knew one another well like a family since they were a small community.

The shift from *musyawarah* to the modern election has changed the village peoples' perspective and respect toward the *reje* and *imem*. Bangka Wali describes the change as follows: "...the current *reje* and *imem* are by political accident in their positions. They were chosen because of the sentiment of the voters, not because of rational considerations like in the *musyawarah* system. They are respected because of their current position. People cannot escape them because the citizen's need for the government. It is not related to their quality and personality. Only *musyawarah* can bring and force a qualified person to become *reje* or *imem*."

Moreover, the regular income that village functionaries earn changes the relation between them and village members, from reciprocal to nonreciprocal. During the New Order, the large majority of *reje* and *imem* were not paid by the government; only a small number of *reje* leading villages in urban areas received a salary. Today, both *reje* and *imem* are considered "workers," as they are paid to serve the community needs. They also get some bonus, training and government projects as extra income. As a consequence, *reje* and *imem* have less influence.

According to all my informants in Kebayakan as well as other parts in Takengen, the state's remuneration of the *reje* and *imem* have reduced the local people's participation in village development. Social cohesion and participation

have decreased and individualism has increased compared to the past. My interlocutors Aman Ilman, Aman Kusnaldi, dan Aman Sofyan, told me one day during a fishing trip around the lakeshore of Lot Tawar of Mendale village that, "...today people are more individualist. It is quite hard to invite people to provide mutual assistance (*Gotong Royong*) for the common good of the village. Everyone wants to be served as they think that this is what they (*reje* and other functionaries – A.) are paid for."

## Conclusion

The village experience in Gayo suggests that the government could not influence the social field through state law unless the government recognized the whole body of adat operating in the community and unless it would involve the community in village development programs. This chapter shows that by doing so the government has been more effective in implementing its social engineering and modernization agenda, and in increasing control on the village.

Village rights to express their cultural ideas and preferences have been guaranteed through a series of policies on the village at the national and regional levels. In Gayo, as we have seen, the government has allowed the reintroduction of the template of the traditional political structure. The government controls this structure by having created a new power relationship between the offices and between the office and the people. The government has also changed the territorial basis for governance, shifting the *reje*'s political and legal authority from persons to territory.

This government's approach affects the social and political relations in the village. As a result, social cohesion and participation at the village level have decreased, where these values had always been the most important capital in the village and for which a village would earn a reputation. The new political developments have changed the relations in the community from more into less reciprocal

To draw an analogy, the transformation is like re-building a traditional house following the traditional structure but its cubicles, equipment, and appliances are arranged and installed in a modern way. In this traditional-modern building analogy of the village, *reje*, *imem* and other functionaries are appointed by the district government after they have been elected by village members. The village officials get support and legitimation from the government to preside over the adat tribunal to solve community issues on behalf of the state. In this manner they have become government's agents at the village level. The government's influence is even stronger and deeper now than during the New Order.

However, the government's control and influence in the village are limited to political and developmental aspects. In the legal sphere, the autonomy of the village is real and has even increased through the government's support. This is a consequence of the limits of the government in legal enforcement, and the hierarchy of the legal systems introduced by the government, which has reinforced the application of adat law. The government has even become dependent on adat institutions to compensate the government's limits in legal enforcement. I will discuss this development in the following chapters.